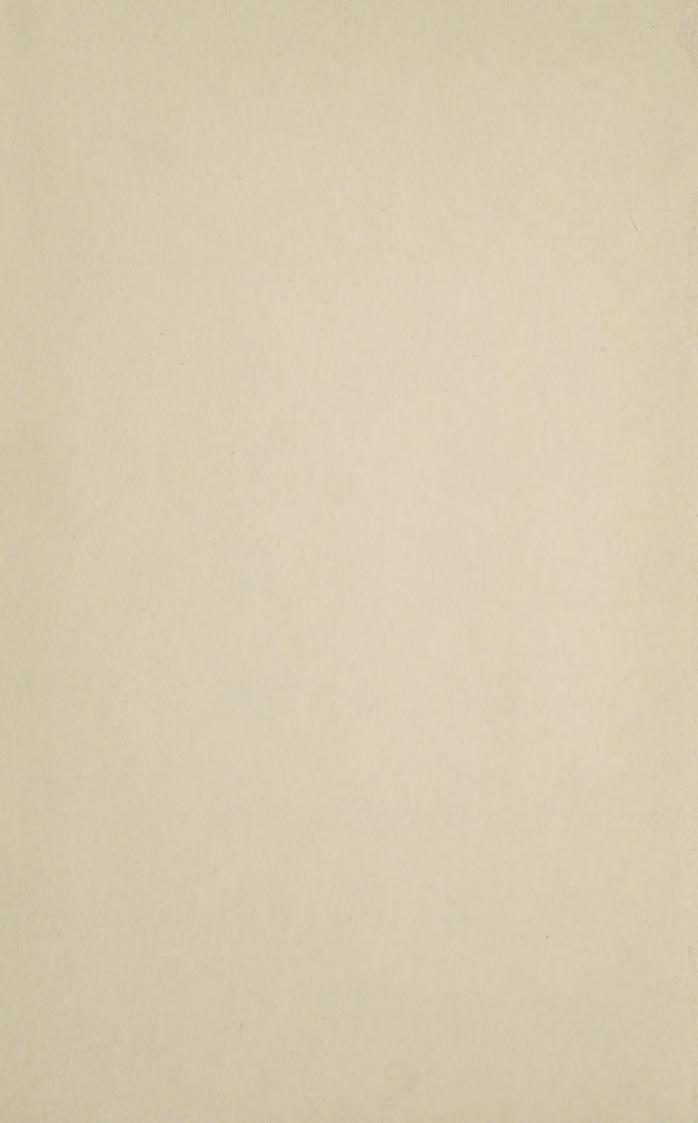
# On The Fighting Line

Constance Smedley









## On the Fighting Line

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G. P. Putnam's Sons

New York and London The Knickerbocker Press

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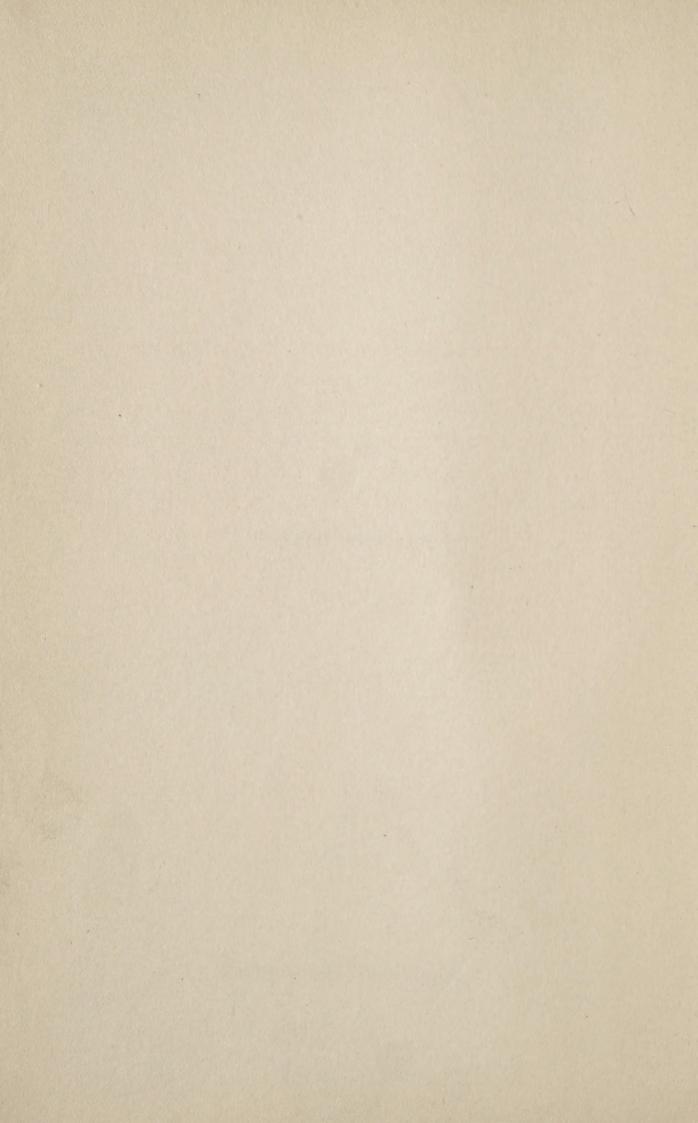
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JULY 14TH, 1914



IF apologies are needed for the title of this novel, it may be said that the manuscript was finished and the title chosen many months before the outbreak of War. While the incidents are not of a military character, the catastrophe of the European War may, perhaps, in some measure, be traceable to the social conditions and tendencies analysed in the book. For this reason and because the phrase is so closely woven into the story, it seems justifiable to retain the title "On the Fighting Line."

THE AUTHOR.

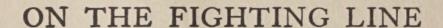
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### On the Fighting Line

#### CHAPTER I

#### THE SKY PARLOUR

LONDON, MY SKY PARLOUR, Jan. 1st.

WONDER how many people are starting the New Year with nothing left to wish for?

It's as if I've swept into one of those oases of warm still air which aviators talk about: one minute tossed and buffeted in tempestuous uncertainty, and then suddenly swoosh into serene and comfortable steadiness with nothing left to fight about or trouble over.

Last January seems like a bad dream, though the storm that was happening then was a relief after the years of tossing up and down, knowing I should be pitchforked into something terrible one day. When I was a small child I knew we were in debt because father couldn't sell his writings, and that the only hope of our worrying through at all, depended upon mother. Mother meant safety and home and everything practical; it was she who taught me the value of commonsense and success, although she dreaded the idea that some day I might have to earn my living. If she had not died, I should never have been allowed to go to the Polytechnic. Mother did believe so in girls being feminine and ladies. She always said there would be a home for me with Aunt Minnie and Uncle Samuel; I'm glad mother didn't live to know the horror I feel now at such a prospect. Being poor and insignificant in London isn't pleasant, but being poor and insignificant in a little country town, is impossible to contemplate.

Of course Aunt Minnie is mother's sister, and mother never seemed to realize how funny her accent is, and how unspeakably badly dressed both she and Uncle Samuel are. She always talked about the nice home they had and Uncle Samuel's position in Scroose, and felt it very much that father's pride prevented him going to stay with them. I always thought father would not go because Aunt Minnie and Uncle Samuel were

rich and influential, and he was poor and a failure, until mother's funeral, when they came up, very, very kindly, and offered to take me back with them to recover from the shock.

Aunt Minnie wore shiny gloves and called Uncle Samuel "Mr. Barnet." They were both terribly afraid of father, and beside them father was like someone of a different breed. I felt him wince at every word they said, and I couldn't help wincing too, though I wanted so to like them, because of mother.

When I saw them, I understood why father's people had refused to have anything to do with him, when he married mother and became related to her family. It came over me in a great wave of horror. I was furious that I was related to them. And rather than be dependent on them, I felt I would sweep the streets. Directly after they had gone, I made inquiries about getting work, and just wrenched the money out of father for my Polytechnic classes. I suggested he should sell some of his old books. I was desperate. How glad I am that I insisted. I have a niche in the world now. I support myself.

Poor father; he seemed to go to pieces when mother died, although they never appeared very fond of one another; mother was always so practical and managing. I could think of nothing but my Polytechnic classes and there was no one to send father out to see his editors and keep him up to the mark, and though it must have been a relief to be let alone, in a way, he missed it. He took to sitting looking at the fire all day, and brooding, and when he started a cough, it just took possession of him.

Poor father!

It's harrowing to be bobbing about in the ocean without a life-belt; it's uncomfortable tossing about in a cockleshell of a boat which you know the family can't steer, but it's grand to be on a great majestic vessel which crushes the waves into foam, and that's where I am now, in the office of the Imperial Alliance Trust. When at midday buses, drays, and motors bubble round the Bank and spill into the streets, the City reminds me of the sea; the currents meet and foam, the buildings stand up like great rocks, and the passers-by are as evanescent and as insignificant as bubbles. Upon this mighty sea, the Imperial Alliance proudly rides, supported by it.

Into the far corners of the world the tides of London flow, stamping our Empire more firmly on the universe, like the pattern which the waves make on the sand.

The Alliance Trust underwrites companies formed to promote Imperial interests. Through us, Canadian lumber has been exploited; bananas have come forth in golden freights from the West Indies; railways have stretched steel tentacles across Rhodesia; townships have been built and lit and furnished; rice fields have been planted, wheatfields have been sown; whatever the Alliance thinks well to aid, flourishes promptly, for there is no firm in the City with such power and reputation.

It's lovely to come home to my little sky parlour after business all day, successful business with successful men; I don't miss father or mother; I can't think of anything but the wonder of being the tiniest part of such a firm as the Alliance.

How can people fritter their time away when they get into an office like that. The other girls don't seem to realize the magnitude of the whole thing—they don't care whether our schemes succeed or not; they simply wait for six o'clock so that they can shoot back into their private lives; and bring their trumpery little engrossments with them.

Miss Beckles reeks of scent and keeps a picture

postcard of Gertie Millar under her typewriter, and Miss Patten refreshes herself with peeps at women's papers. To-day she read out an article called "Typists Chances," in which a gentleman noticed a girl when she took in the letters to her employer, asked for an introduction, and married her; she thought that bit might happen to any of us.

As if anyone with Mr. Grainge would notice his clerks. Miss Beckles and Miss Patten don't understand how inferior we are. The very look of the room we work in, ought to wake them up to the unsurpassable difference between us and Mr. Grainge. We are at the top in a big room lighted by a skylight, with so small a stove that we have to keep our coats on, and even then, we shiver. The floor is covered with linoleum, the walls are dirty, the chairs are hard and high, and there isn't a bit of carpet for our feet. But in Mr. Grainge's room, the doors and fittings and furniture are mahogany and there's a glow of subdued Eastern colours in the thick-piled rugs; and there are great leather armchairs, and roll-top desks, and Mr. Grainge sits amongst it all, heavy and paunchy, like an Eastern God. I have only been in once.

It's a privilege to help him, however humbly.

If I were in Miss Patten's place and took his letters,—and she complains of the stairs when she has to go down more than once, complains if she is kept late, complains of the rate at which he gabbles when he gets enthusiastic.

But then Miss Patten has about as much imagination as a sparrow. She came home with me one night for supper, and said she should have heart disease if she had to climb all those dark stairs every time she came home, and never saw the charm of my sky parlour is that it's tucked away in the top of that great warehouse, away from everyone. She hated my dear little landing, with its low roof and three black doors in the bulging wall, like animal dens. I could fancy anything coming out of them: a cow in a bonnet or a great fat sheep. But Miss Patten couldn't appreciate the skylight through which the moon and stars shine, and light up my little door; and said the whole thing gave her the creeps and was it quite nice living up there by myself, next to a gentleman?

I've never even seen the tenant of the next rooms; his name, Jack Ford, is printed on the door, but I go straight into my den when I come home and don't stir out again till morning when I'm off before he gets up. I hear him moving about and talking to his friends; lots of people come to see him in the evenings. I suppose Miss Patten would be always hovering about the landing. I hate the way she talks and thinks about men; it degrades them. From the shouts of laughter that come through the wall, Jack Ford sounds like a man's man, and I like him to be left alone. I like being alone myself. My parlour reminds me of a ship's cabin and I keep the bits of brass and china shining as if I were a sailor. The wind roars sometimes in the chimney like the sound of waves. The room is such a darling three-cornered cubby-hole with its great window half-way up the roof, tiny fireplace, and wall cupboards. The bed and father's chair are dressed in frilly covers, and when I stand on the box, I can look through the window and watch the great clouds speeding through the sky like monster ships, or parting to show peaceful seas of stars, with the lights of London twinkling in a haze far, far below. Yet when I'm tucked up in my chair before the fire, I'm looking at something as significant and vast as the clouds and stars and London. I've stuck up the pictures of the bravest, hardest men I've read about, to remind me that anything can be done if you work hard enough and never give in. I adore soldiers, sea-dogs, statesmen, and administrators. I sometimes wonder if there were any in father's family; I should love to be related to men like that. But on the other hand, I don't want to be reminded of father. I want to be reminded about successful people; I want to study how they got success. Success is my one demand. The office of the Imperial Alliance is a temple of success; Mr. Grainge breathes out success; Sir Mordaunt Mordaunt is the living symbol of success; and at last my life is a success for I'm in the Alliance office, and drawing twenty-five shillings a week, and banking three shillings every Saturday.

Jan. 4th, Monday.

To-day I've been picked out.

I was called in to Mr. Grainge this morning for some extra work: it was so exciting typing his letters that I missed lunch, and was still busy at it, when Miss Beckles and Miss Patten came strolling in, arguing hotly as to whether a wife should make home attractive to her husband. Miss Patten thought she ought to, as that was what she had been married for, but Miss Beckles said it was

practically impossible to get a husband out at night under any circumstances, and it was nothing short of lunacy to encourage him to stay at home.

I was typing as loudly as I could to drown their chatter when Mr. Benson looked in and asked who was free. I had just that moment finished. It really was a coup to get all those letters finished by two-thirty, and it was jolly to be rewarded in this way.

So I went down, Mr. Grainge's letters in my hand.

I nearly fell through the floor; Sir Mordaunt Mordaunt was with him.

Mr. Grainge is Managing Director, and Sir Mordaunt is only a Director, but they say he is the power behind the throne. He is not a bit like Mr. Grainge who is the living image of Cecil Rhodes. Sir Mordaunt is reddish and squirish, though his long drooping nose and sharp small eyes give him the City look. Such a dominant penetrating look it is.

They wanted me to take down a prospectus. An irrigation scheme is now afoot. A wonderful new plant has been invented, and the Alliance Trust has taken up one-fifth of the shares. The remainder has been satisfactorily placed, partly

through the concessionaires and partly through Sir Mordaunt's agency. It was breath-taking to be sitting there, hearing them discussing millions as casually as if they had been shillings. We have to place 100,000 shares at  $7\frac{1}{2}\%$  and we get 10%; so the Alliance stands to make a good thing out of it. I'm not so interested in that part, however, as in the idea of buying up the waste and desert corners of the Empire and irrigating them until they become fertile dwelling-places and granaries and orchards. It's too wonderful to think what one can do, by just sitting still in a city office, and thinking, and writing, and talking. Millions of acres will be populated through the talk those two men had this afternoon, and the prospectus I took down is the messenger that will tell people about it, and win their co-operation.

The way it is to be done, sounds confusing, for money has to be raised through foreign banks and mortgages one on top of the other like a juggler's pile of plates. First you get concessions by promising money, and then you get promises of money by promising concessions,—but it's no use, I can't make head or tail of the complications; all I've gathered is the splendid idea of the scheme, and the fact that the Alliance has to place 100,000,

and Mr. Grainge thinks it's easy, and Sir Mordaunt snarls and grunts and evidently doesn't.

Even if he is a great financier, the way Sir Mordaunt speaks to Mr. Grainge makes me hot. Mr. Grainge is too big a man to be annoyed; he is genial even to me, and he is simply charming with Sir Mordaunt, refusing to take his ill-humour seriously, and always saying the one thing which can mollify him. Mr. Grainge never flatters. Sir Mordaunt would be annoyed at anything as crude as that. And Mr. Grainge doesn't always accept Sir Mordaunt's ideas by any means, but he plays him gently, as if Sir Mordaunt was a ticklish fish.

"Now give us something succinct for the last paragraph," said Mr. Grainge, "something that will stir the imagination." He leaned back in his chair like a genial King Henry the Eighth.

"I distrust imagination in prospectuses," snapped out Sir Mordaunt as if Mr. Grainge were a defaulter.

I should have shrivelled up into a pellet, but Mr. Grainge only leaned back, laughing, and said: "My dear Sir Mordaunt, one of your short pithy phrases stimulates my imagination more than anything I know. I always say you're a wizard at words." It was as if someone had aimed

at him and struck, and he was handing the shaft back, congratulating the marksman.

Sir Mordaunt grunted, and presently evolved a sentence which I could see nothing particular in.

Sir Mordaunt may have more money, but Mr. Grainge is far and away the greater man. Mordaunt is perpetually prickling with the knowledge of his money and importance; Mr. Grainge doesn't think about himself, only of the great works he's carrying through. Sir Mordaunt picks and pecks and hums and haws about whether this will pay, and will they be left with this on their hands, and is that too big a price for that concession, and couldn't they squeeze a wharfage out of this concession, and so on, riddling the scheme to see if he can possibly perforate it so that it won't hold water. Mr. Grainge plans and builds, the master of every obstacle that rises; he has the ideas, he sees the perfect work beyond the struggle all the time. If he hadn't a shilling in the world, I believe he would set out to build a fleet of liners, or a railway from Persia to Hong Kong.

I can't say what it meant to me when Mr. Grainge picked up my pile of letters, and asked me how long I should be with the rest, and I was able to say those were the lot.

"That's quick," said he. "No one here has a speed like that."

"Let's look at 'em," snarled Sir Mordaunt; he is the sort of person who will never let the slightest detail pass. He picked up the letters now, and his gimlet eyes peered at them, trying to perforate them, but in vain. I do type well.

And then I suddenly realised I had typed through lunch. It was horrid to have to tell them. "Ah, of course, in that case," snapped Sir Mordaunt, dismissing my presumptions.

But Mr. Grainge nodded as if he were pleased "I never want to leave off," said he. Sir Mordaunt was staring at the fire, but as I turned I felt his sharp eyes on me, and then he said: "She'd better take Richard's."

"Let's see, he is to have Benson's room—I had thought Miss Patten might manage both," said Mr. Grainge.

I stood waiting for my fate to be decided; a word might swing it one way or the other. Who was Richard?

"Put this girl on: she seems capable," said Sir Mordaunt in a voice there could be no contradicting.

"All right, then. Report yourself to Mr.

Mordaunt to-morrow morning after he's finished with me," said Mr. Grainge, "and I want that prospectus at the printers' by five-thirty. Can you do it?"

Could I do it!

Then I was out of the room with the news that young Mr. Mordaunt is coming to the Alliance, and I am to take his letters.

It's so exciting that something else which has happened is scarcely exciting at all.

Jack Ford and I have met in a touchingly domestic manner. When I came home, someone was going upstairs, two flights in front of me; I was thinking Jack Ford would be well in his room by the time I reached the landing, when bumpity bump, down the stairs rolled something. I had gained one flight, and now flew up the other and fielded an onion. It wasn't news that Jack Ford liked onions, for one can't help knowing what neighbors on the same landing have for supper. But he must be afflicted by a perfect mania for them. The first was the precursor of a torrent.

Jack Ford came running down. He turns out to be young, square, and chubby, like a goodtempered small boy only that his square-set jaw and weather-beaten eyes indicate he's knocked about the world a bit. He speaks in a calm drawl and didn't seem to mind being caught carrying onions. He swore gently when two left his arms suddenly, after I had piled the last ones on. I had to go down after them, for he was loaded to his chin, and he calmly trudged up to his room. I don't know if he expected me to keep the onions as a sort of tip, but he shut his door after him, and I actually had to knock to give him back his precious possessions. He really might have waited. He thanked me in a confidential way but not nearly so much as I should have expected. He appeared to think it quite natural for a girl to pick up a man's onions. I can't help feeling he is rather cool; I should say, perhaps, unmanly. I do like manly men.

I have been smelling the onions the last hour.

I should never bother to fry onions for myself.

How funny men are.

Not that I think a manly man would bother.

How could he sit in his room after, even smoking? Oh dear, I wish to-morrow would come. I'm yearning to begin my first real job. I wonder if young Mr. Mordaunt snaps like his father. Miss Patten is thrilled he's coming. I suppose she has begun a new dream of young Mr. Mordaunt seeing

her clicking, and thinking how sweet she'd look at a sewing-machine.

Jan. 5th, Tuesday.

Mr. Richard is brusque but he doesn't snap. His nose doesn't droop like Sir Mordaunt's; it's straight, like his eyebrows which almost meet, over dark, bright eyes. He's like Sir Mordaunt in his squirishness and brownness, and tall upright figure. He would look glorious in flannels. He is the typical captain of cricket teams. His authoritative air reminds me of Sir Mordaunt, but Mr. Richard is pleasanter; his curtness is due to nervousness, I fancy, for he is only a boy and doesn't want to show his inexperience. Though it's wonderful how he has tumbled into things his first day. When I went in this morning, he was sitting at his desk as if the office belonged to him, and glanced at me as carelessly as if he had been used to seeing me every day of his life. Yet I don't believe he had ever given a letter in shorthand before. I took down the first sentence in three dots or so, and then waited, and waited, till he became red, and asked if I'd got that. Anyone who knew anything about dictating, would have known I had. He kept looking at me out of the

corner of his eye, trying to bluff, after that, but I like people who have no doubts as to their right to rule, and will never own they're wrong, or don't know anything they ought to know. It is plain Mr. Richard will never be treated as an ordinary person by anyone. He has come straight into a position of authority, as Mr. Grainge's confidante, apparently. He is to work with Mr. Grainge on the new scheme. It will be almost as good as working with Mr. Grainge himself.

The only remark that Mr. Richard made to me, was that the blotting-paper was beastly; the pink swore with the wallpaper. When I brought in his letters after lunch I noticed he had invested in a packet of delicate grey, and an ebony ruler. One can see he has been used to everything of the very best.

#### Jan. 9th, Saturday.

I can't think how I ever thought Mr. Richard like his father. He sees eye to eye with Mr. Grainge in everything, regarding him as a young soldier would regard his superior officer, ready to obey and trust him implicitly, and yet, thrilling with the meaning of it all. After the supine indifference of the girls, it is meat and drink to be working with Mr. Richard.

He is wild with excitement over this new scheme; of course it's his first job, but I can see already he is the sort of person who can become truly enthusiastic over things. Mr. Grainge and he are shut up for hours together, and then Mr. Richard comes out with lists of names and I take down letters to such interesting people. Mr. Grainge and Mr. Richard seem to know ever so many. Mr. Richard writes to men he doesn't know, too, for Mr. Grainge feels the nation must awake to its Imperial responsibilities, and this irrigation business is of great importance to every loyal member of our nation. Above all the Alliance deals with Englishmen and English capital; we always mention that; "All for England" is our slogan; our lands must not be allowed to be exploited by foreign bandits, otherwise financiers. I suppose the foreign banks that are in the scheme represent the capital of Englishmen who live abroad.

The letters make me quite excited as I write them. After we have spent millions and poured out our blood to colonize, and civilize the untamed corners of the world, it does seem a sin that the country should apathetically allow the profits and control to go elsewhere.

It makes such a difference if one takes down

letters consecutively, and can follow the whole plan day by day. I sit like an automaton, of course, but it's fine to think one is a useful, reliable machine, and now and then, Mr. Richard glances at me in a furtive sort of way, as if he wants to know if I am stirred by his letters. I seem to understand him exactly, perhaps because this is my first big job too. And then there's such a sense of team-work about a scheme of such magnitude. For I'm English and its as much my Empire as anyone's.

Jan. 29th, Friday.

Mr. Richard and I have talked to-day like human beings.

Things haven't been going as well as they should, with the great scheme. The general tone of the replies hasn't been satisfactory, people look at the project as a mere commercial venture, and like Sir Mordaunt, are sceptical of quick return on capital. As if that mattered!

Some people approve, but not the most influential ones, and the people on whom Mr. Grainge depended for immediate support, appear to be tied up for the moment. Two are away, one has come into a legacy of death duties, and another

has been hit heavily in Peruvians. Everyone puts personal interests before the Empire. Sir Mordaunt is away, fortunately, and is going to be away for a month or more, but these last days Mr. Grainge has looked worried, and Mr. Richard isn't as fresh and debonair as he ought to be and is starting a permanent frown.

There was another big disappointment to-day, and he sat pulling at his lip as if he had forgotten I was in the room. Suddenly he jumped up and walked up and down the room like a young knight who's overcome with the rottenness of everything, and at last he couldn't help letting out. I had never realized how unpatriotic we are as a nation, till Mr. Richard flung out the words, and I saw a nature like his being hurt.

Before I thought, I said, "Yes, it's too bad"; I'm glad I didn't stifle my feelings for that word just set him off.

He said everyone was asleep and soft and comfortable, and it was like trying to educate a lot of kids. No one expected thanks, but one did expect people to see what was going on under their noses. In the Alliance, the nation had men who could be trusted to push their own country before everything and not play fast and loose with British prestige

for the sake of a few dirty shekels. But instead of appreciating what was being done, people only thought about their miserable dollars and the men who were trying to build up the Empire were left absolutely unbacked. It was enough to make a man chuck the whole beastly business and stick to coining money and selling his soul and nation as everyone else was doing.

It was as if I heard the Alliance speaking to me, the smallest, most unnoticed little cog in the whole machine; a torrent of fighting energy rushed through me, and I felt the Alliance must bring this scheme to pass, however blind and apathetic the public was.

"Mr. Grainge will pull things through," said I.

"Yes, if he were left a free hand," chafed Mr. Richard. "But the hell of it is, my father's not with him in this, not really with him. He could put the whole thing right if he liked. But he won't put a cent of his own money into it."

"Doesn't he believe in it?" said I, a little scared, I must confess, by this.

"Oh, he believes in it, in a way, but he's not doing what he might do," said Mr. Richard, worried and dark with fear.

Yes, fear. Although he trusted Mr. Grainge's

plans, I saw that he was thinking of his father's money all the time.

"Mr. Grainge will find a way out," said I; "Money's nothing compared to the idea. Mr. Grainge can meet any contingency, he can think out a way of getting anything he wants. Your father isn't the only person in the world with money. I think it's splendid that Mr. Grainge is left alone to carry the whole thing through. Now you'll all see he's independent of anybody's money."

"Unfortunately, money's everything in this world," said Mr. Richard.

"It's not, it's just the servant, it's nothing in itself. Mr. Grainge has thought out how to make the deserts full of use and life, for the glory of the Empire; all the money in the world couldn't think out the tiniest plan of improving or helping anything; Mr. Grainge will have what money he needs, you see," said I.

Mr. Richard stood and looked at me as if I were a desk or chair which had suddenly spoken intelligibly.

"You look as if you'd come into a fortune," said he.

"It's the sun on my face, it's so jolly and warm,"

said I, feeling unaccountably happy, as if we had really all the money in the world behind us.

"It's the sun in your face," said Mr. Richard; "you've quite bucked me up," and then suddenly the sun came out in his face, and he smiled at me, the nicest, friendliest sort of smile.

I looked down on my pad; I wanted to cry with happiness. I felt as if I had been taken into the whole splendid business and accepted by my chiefs as a living, breathing helper instead of a machine.

We didn't speak again except about the letters. I think Mr. Richard was shy at having said so much, and I was terribly shy at having said anything at all; but when I went out of the room, though he didn't look up from his desk, in fact, rather more down on it than usual, everything was different. I was a member of his team, not an imbecile parasite like— I really must not despise Miss Beckles and Miss Patten so much. They are English too. But I feel like an English man, and they are such unmistakable English women.

I feel nearer my heroes to-night. Their grim eyes look at me as if to say, "What a fuss about nothing"; the uniformed array remind me armies are made up of fighting men, and I am only one of a million of people who've loved their

country; but never mind, I am on the fighting strength. I'm ready to do things for my country, and I love my work; I don't only want to catch a husband and live in a kennel growing fat. This business of Empire is mine and someone who (for all his youth), is among the men who care and do things, has been helped by me to-day.

### Feb. 8th, Monday.

The most terrifying thing about the City, is the way the noise and rush go on when one's depressed and isn't in the mood for effort; then the traffic sweeps by like a flood which has no mercy. Everyone is hurrying for personal gain, no one cares for the fellow-beings that pass by; on we go, thinking of our own concerns, full of our own troubles, anxious for our own desires, blankly indifferent to anybody else's business, and, if we catch a peep of someone else's private life, contemptuous.

What sort of a life does Mr. Grainge lead when he isn't at the office, I wonder; where does he glide away to in his car? Where does Mr. Richard go to, after office hours? For eight or nine hours every day we are all shut up together, and then the City disgorges us and tosses us back into our separate spheres. How different they are! And how some of us would scorn each other's!

Funnily enough, the men go back to ease and comfort and general softness. One can't imagine Mr. Grainge handling an onion, peeling it, bending over a poky little grate and frying; one can't imagine Mr. Richard rubbing a saucepan with Monkey brand in a very small tin basin, after a bread-and-milk supper. But Miss Patten cooks her mother's supper when she gets in, and cleans the flat, makes her clothes and mends and brushes them; and I have to do everything for myself, and even one room takes a lot of cleaning when one comes home late and tired.

It's a strange idea that women are the weaker sex and are taken care of. If one could fly over the City at mid-day and see it feeding, it would look as if the stronger sex had grabbed the best places and shoved the women into pretty poor conditions. Few business women are in the comfortable restaurants and hotels. They don't get there because they are weak and haven't the courage or initiative in business that men show; but Miss Patten's articles are foolish when they paint woman's weakness as her chief treasure. If men really worshipped our weakness they would

give us the big salaries and comfortable restaurants and Turkey carpeted offices. Weakness never gets rewarded, whether in women or men.

I've always liked men to have the best of everything for I consider they deserve it, but to-day something happened that humiliated me.

We passed Mr. Richard as we were going into The Teashop. He didn't see us; he was with another man; both very smart and eager and pressing forward. But the sight of him made my eating-place squalid and sordid. I hated being relegated to that sort of place; I hated the cocoa and apricots and cream which Miss Patten and I generally have, sharing the cream; I felt pressed down with hundreds of noisome, wriggling animal-cula under a glass. The weight on the top could never be moved although we could see the other world from which we were cut off forever.

It's despicable to be grubby, and I hate being despicable.

# Feb. 10th, Wednesday.

Well, well, there's something worse than being poor. Miss Patten has an admirer. I have lunched with her for the last time; it was as if she and the young man were in an illuminated disc,

smirking and mincing and totally oblivious of everyone around them, except that they had a vague idea, I think, that they were showing off to great advantage, and I was an envious and admiring audience.

Thank goodness, I never shall know any men to smirk at me.

I felt sick with scorn. He has a little moustache which he twirls, and he says, "Oh, ah, you say so, don't you, I don't think," in a cunning, knowing manner, and Miss Patten dared to tell him she had no opinion of men!

I ordered my own cream and left them to it.

Miss Patten came back late, all in a flutter, and told me she was awfully annoyed with him for being such an idiot about her, but she really couldn't help it. If ever I encourage a man to talk to me, which heaven forbid, I won't lie about it. If it's womanly to mew about and mince and pose in a way that wouldn't deceive a kitten, I'll be furiously unwomanly.

Though Miss Beckles is that. She believes in being bold; she says it pays. She looks on men as penny-in-the-slot machines, to be plundered. The only way to keep one's self-respect, is to concentrate on business.

I turn out of the street and set my foot in the hall of the Alliance, and I'm in my own little niche in the world and can hold up my head. I am part of a great Imperial power, and I'm used to every mark on the wall, and every tread of the staircarpet, and the door that I pass hides the splendid comrade I work with, for that's what Mr. Richard is, and the further door shuts in our Chief. And then comes the dingy stair to our quarters, and that's the homiest part of all.

# Feb. 11th, Thursday.

Well of all the funny presents that anybody ever had! To-night I have received a hot veal cutlet!

I wonder if even Miss Patten could make a romance out of that? When I think of it, I want to laugh.

I was very tired to-night; Mr. Grainge and Mr. Richard are working all they know to get results before Sir Mordaunt comes back. Mr. Richard talks freely now. I do like working with him. If ever there was a man's man, it's he. But he has a tremendous lot of work to do, and when he has gone, I have to stop and do it. I love doing it, but when I have to go down to the post-office to

catch the late mail, it finishes me off. When I got in to-night, I found there was no butter; I couldn't have gone out again if I'd been hungrier than I was. I didn't feel I could light the fire; I dropped into the chair and wanted to cry, only I can't break down before my people on the mantelshelf. But I could only just buck up.

Then Jack Ford walked in with a frying-pan.

He had just received a wire, inviting him to supper, and he was going away the next day and didn't think it would keep. He was as casual as if I had been his cook and he had come into the kitchen and said: "Here, you might as well finish up this."

When he saw me twinkle, he twinkled back, in his confidential way, as if life generally was a pretty good joke, and it was convenient I happened to be there to clear out his larder.

He was in a hurry to be off, and really didn't give me a chance to refuse his gift, merely asked me to put the pan inside his door and be sure and get the black off the bottom. He took it for granted I should wash-up. Well, I should, of course, but when a man comes in and finds a girl deadbeat, it does seem queer that he should give her instructions about doing things for him; I could

scarcely believe my ears. But dear me, he might, yes, he might have been speaking to his cook.

I have cleaned his pan as it hasn't been cleaned in its lifetime. It was caked with grime, the dirt of years. Get the black off the bottom, indeed!

Feb. 12th, Friday.

We met on the landing this morning. I told him the pan had been very dirty. He said, "Yes, he hated washing-up. A woman was a better hand at that sort of thing!"

He looked as cheery as ever, quite smart this morning in a new suit. I wonder what he does. A lot of people come to see him; when he isn't out, there's nearly always someone there in the evening. I can't get over his cheek about that pan.

# CHAPTER II

#### FEBRUARY VIOLETS

Feb. 20th, Saturday.

THERE was a wetness in the air to-day which made me think of spring; I stood and drank it in. The tide was rushing up in freshets and the air was salt upon my face. I shook the crinkles out as I stood there. Battersea presses me and creases me, but the wetness and the waters were so fresh.

Father once made a poem that said the river was the song of London, starting with crashing chords where the sea thunders in, and warships ride at anchor, and docks and yards and barracks smear its course. A cloud of smoke shadows the green fields through which it wends its way, but there is something majestic in the grimy flood, and the sunsets turn the water and the marshes into flame. Then the river is met by clanking anvils and the roar of fires, and is drawn into the

hungry city where the warehouses gape open. There the commerce of the world eddies back and forth, devoured and sent out forever; and freed, the river flows on into the sun-dipped reaches where men play and rest.

To-day, the river came up in a cold, grey flood, and I remembered father saying England was a male country; the tide was so remorseless and so strong.

But there was a hint of laughter and sweetness in the moist soft wind that puffed about the waters, welcoming them. I too welcomed the flood; I too rejoiced to see it come.

There were violets in the streets, giving out such hardy sweetness. How precious they are in this grey season! Their petals don't get nipped, they are oases of growing things. I love the cold wet bunches one gets when they are plentiful, but this morning the bunches were small and three pence each. Too much.

If I'd bought one, oh, if I'd bought one—for something has happened which I am certain isn't right. And yet there was nothing in it, very much. Only I have an uncomfortable feeling, as if I've sinned ever so little against the office.

There was a stir of spring everywhere, though

the sky was grey. When I went into Mr. Richard's room such a lovely scent rushed out that I couldn't help saying, "English, aren't they?"

You can't mistake the sweetness of real English violets.

He was wearing a bunch of the neat small violets that grow in sheltered woods under the dried leaves; oh, but they were sweet!

"Yes, from Devon; my florist has special orders," said Mr. Richard. "It's extraordinary how difficult it is to get the real kind. Do have them!"

He slipped the bunch out of his coat, and held it out across his desk.

"It's all right, it'll freshen up your office," said he; and then he began to blush for I was standing like a dummy, growing crimsoner and crimsoner. Everyone in my office knew I hadn't come with violets, and if I went back with these, what wouldn't they say?

"Thank you very much," said I. "They're rather strong."

"But that's the beauty of them," said Mr. Richard. "Look here, you aren't going to tell me the scent's too much for you; please think out something cleverer than that."

There was a little obstinacy in his voice, as if he

knew he hadn't acted quite wisely, and was daring me and himself. It was all very well for him to be resolutely commonplace; for nothing he could offer, would I have gone back to our room, having to be resolutely commonplace to Miss Patten and Miss Beckles.

"No, thank you," said I. It was stupid that he couldn't give them me. I hated standing there like a simpering prig; and I was insane to blush. I could see he was furious that I'd blushed. And he was blushing too, and perfectly mad because he was. For I'm confident that when he offered them, he'd done it without thinking.

He's so natural and straightforward. No wonder he resented being put into a false position.

"Oh, very well," said he, and went on with his letters.

I wish I'd left it alone, but I could tell by his voice that he was angry, and I hated him to think I was self-conscious and thought he'd meant anything by it.

I knew if I waited till he'd finished, I should never dare to speak (how I wish I had waited), so I suddenly burst out.

I explained that I hated anyone to talk of anything except business, inside the office, and I felt at any cost, one must keep up discipline. By the time I'd finished, it sounded as if I wanted the violets desperately; but I did want him to understand I hadn't refused them because I hadn't valued them.

He was redder than ever when I'd done, but nice, almost too nice.

He ought not to have said, "What a little brick you are!"

I can't say "Rot" to anyone like him. And we must not start blushing at each other. It gives a bad impression. He was looking at me, and I was looking down, and we weren't saying anything for I didn't know what to say, and he didn't seem to want to say anything, when we both jumped and flamed scarlet. Mr. Grainge looked in.

"Oh, I didn't hear anyone, I thought there was no one here," said he.

"Did you want me, sir? I'm almost through," said Mr. Richard, and we plunged in, and Mr. Grainge retired.

It would have been unbearable if Mr. Richard hadn't made a little joke. He glanced up with the glimmer of a smile as I was going, and said, "Is it discipline to disobey orders?"

"Doesn't it depend on what the orders are?"

said I. Nothing's very bad if one can laugh about it.

"I think not," said Mr. Richard.

"If the orders don't bring credit on the office," said I, "I think it's right to—"

"Disobedience is never right, it's anarchy," said Mr. Richard, very firm and handsome.

"I was going to say, I think it's right to point out the order may be a mistake, if you're certain it is a mistake," said I. "And ask for—further orders."

Mr. Richard's eyes danced.

"Very smart," said he, "very smart, indeed; very well, then, wait for further orders, Miss Blunt."

His eyes were shining with sheer mischief. I went out of the room, very happy somehow, but the uneasy feeling was there. It was as if he'd started a sort of battle; I know he'll try and trip me up, for fun. He is only a boy, and such a nice one. I wonder what Mr. Grainge saw—and thought.

Later.

The further orders have arrived. I knew somehow; but how good of him. I've never had

flowers sent me before; it seems incredible that anyone could think of sending such a quantity, it feels almost sinful to possess so many.

How different the room looks, how different everything is; a few minutes ago I was scribbling away, with my mind fixed on one tiny little bunch of violets as a treasure, and now the table's piled with them, every jar is full, and the room breathes out luxury and ease and spring; above all, spring. London spring; spring in the country isn't expensive; I can't get away from the thought of the amount those violets must have cost.

Oh, how good of him, how good of him.

Such a lovely hamper too, that I can use; I've wanted a nice basket to keep potatoes in, instead of my dirty old soap-box; they can be stowed away now daintily.

And it was so jolly to send his card with "Further orders," on it.

Oh, I'm glad I didn't take his little bunch; no one need know of these; though they're so bountiful it seems too bad someone else can't share them.

I shan't feel a bit shy about thanking him; I don't mind what happens between him and me, I don't like the other people in the office to know, because they're silly and sordid.

Oh, the scent of them; and the sight of them; it's like being lifted suddenly into heaven.

Feb. 12th, Sunday.

I don't often have anything to give people, and when the violets came, it occurred to me that here was a chance to pay back Jack Ford. He asked me to come in, and I was curious enough to step inside for a few minutes; but it gave me quite a shock when I found he was introducing me to someone.

The firelight scarcely reached inside the chair where the girl sat, but it caught her short velvet skirt cut up almost to her knees, her pretty silk-clad ankles and brightly-buckled shoes. There was an expensive scent stealing from her furs, and an expensive air about her attitude.

I have never been close to anyone like that before. She was very pretty, but I wasn't so much struck by that as by her air of leisure. She lay in the chair like a dropped flower.

Coffee was brewing on the hob, and Jack Ford squatted on the rug and asked if I believed in boiling it, as if he had known me all his life. The girl peeped at me over the top of a great muff, pouting her underlip and sucking in her top one in

a funny, thoughtful way. Her eyes were heavylidded and long-lashed, and she only used the least possible amount, to see through. She was like a soft secret thing lurking and peeping and waiting in the shadow.

I kept noticing little things about her, which increased the sense of expensiveness; the way her hair was waved, the way it shone, the whiteness of her hands, her pink and glittering nails.

The coffee wouldn't boil and she still said nothing to us and presently it dawned on me that we were both being ignored. I don't know how I guessed she was offended at Jack Ford talking to me, but I know she was. And I know, too, that he remained perfectly amiable and chatty, which annoyed her more. It wasn't pleasant to feel I wasn't wanted, and had only been asked in because I had brought him flowers, and I was contemplating an excuse for going when the coffee bubbled over and Jack Ford hurried to pour it out. He served me first, and the girl drew back her hand, and when he came with hers, gave him a sudden melting glance as if she had decided to open fire.

But he settled down on the rug as if we were all dear friends, and chatted away about the piano he is going to have and asked if I liked music, and could I hear through the wall. I can see he likes to give pleasure if it doesn't give him trouble. I couldn't drink my coffee quickly for it was scalding, but I did wish he wouldn't pay any attention to me. I felt the girl was getting more and more annoyed. Though she only held her coffee and looked at the fire with her head thrown back, her eyes sleepily blinking, and her long white throat rising from the furs like a flower stem that had been grown in a hothouse.

"Here I am," she seemed to be saying, "I know my worth. Insult me as much as you like by not attending to me, I'm above it." For such a superfine creature extinguished all the other human beings round her.

Then suddenly she broke through our conversation as if she had neither heard a word, nor cared to hear.

"Of all the people passing in the street below, who could guess what is going on here?" said she. "The fairyishness of life is so much more fairyish than anything one could imagine. Who could picture sane human beings climbing all these stairs simply to sit in a chair and drink coffee which is not good, and never will be, if you boil it."

So that was what they had been quarrelling about!

"It is excellent coffee," said Jack Ford. "I ask for the casting vote. Let us have justice."

Now he was mildly aggrieved.

I said I thought it wasn't half bad considering.

"Oh, come, come," said he, "it's awfully good."

"I don't think the saucepan was quite clean," said I, "it has that taste."

"Oh, now, you consider yourself justified in overhauling my domestic arrangements, do you; how like a woman! Once give her the slightest privilege and she can't keep her hands off your belongings. Now I suppose you'll expect to wash my coffee-pot," said Jack Ford.

Whether he was joking or no I could not say. I do really believe he would have allowed me to wash his pot and saucepan because I had drunk some of the coffee.

"Then you do think it worth while to climb all these stairs for the purpose of drinking this execrable boiled coffee?" said the girl, oh, so sweetly.

I never heard such a winning, persuading, teasing voice. She peeped at me with large, shy eyes, in the most fascinating way, as she spoke.

"It is not execrable; I've never heard such

rudeness," said Jack Ford. "Coffee is the one thing a man can always make."

"But to climb all these stairs," said the girl, still peeping at me in her pretty coaxing way, as if we were together in this little joke. She can make one feel in things. Jack Ford was the person left out, now.

"You see, I don't climb the stairs for that purpose, I live here," said I speaking as if she were a child.

"Oh dear, you always do find out everything you want to, don't you," said Jack Ford in an exasperated way. "Why did you tell her?"

"Why shouldn't I?" said I.

"Because she's so darned clever," said Jack Ford.

The girl's cheek was on her muff in the most delicate, pretty attitude. Did she take any notice of us? Oh dear, no.

"Looking into the tops of buildings is very interesting, but looking into people's thoughts would be much more so," she mused, making very large melting eyes at the fire. "I do wish I could look into every person's mind and see if she or he were capable of understanding me. I do waste such a lot of time on people who aren't my

sort of people at all and never will be." Then she sighed as if she really meant it. And looked down so that we were again left out of things.

"I should say a good many people waste valuable time in trying to understand you," said Jack Ford, pouring out a second cup of coffee ostentatiously.

"But there is something interesting to understand, even if they can't understand it, in me," said she. "So they do get something from the exercise when they succeed. My trouble is that I try to find interesting individualities in ruled copy-books."

"Well, you can't call me that," said Jack Ford, too confidently.

"There can be ruled copy-books of Socialism," said the girl. "Platitudes on capital and labour and justice and equality on straight, straight never-ending lines, that never, never wiggle. There can be terribly uninteresting Socialists."

"To me, nothing is more obvious than the typical capricious young lady," said Jack Ford. "I could sit down and write out a time-table of every stage in her acquaintance with a man."

They were rude to one another!

She examined this remark with composed thoughtfulness.

"Caprices never run straight, at all events," said she. "Though they may run more or less on the same lines—of investigation."

Jack Ford offered me more coffee, and asked if I investigated people.

I told him I didn't know any.

"How can you protect yourself if you don't investigate people?" she argued, pouting her lip, as if he had differed from her.

Even Jack Ford couldn't help smiling. She was so adorably spoilt and naughty.

"It's a dangerous habit," said he, shaking his head very wisely, as if he was refusing to be trapped. And yet one could see he delighted in her. Who could help it?

"You mean it's a safe habit," said the girl, dewy and innocent, and happy now he was allowing himself to flirt ever so little with her. Of course that was what she meant by investigating.

"We must form a non-investigating alliance," said Jack Ford turning to me, and now we were in things together, and the girl in the chair was out of it. She couldn't be included in the ordinary human relations somehow. She must always be

the whole point of interest, like a star performance; or she felt bored and slighted. Whenever Jack Ford looked at me, I felt apologetic to her, and wished that he wouldn't.

But she was so pretty. She did not strike me as being conceited or demanding flattery at all. She knew she was the most exquisite creature that could very well exist; she knew that everything that could enhance her beauty had been attended to; she knew that her clothes were expensive and perfect; and she couldn't forget her value.

She would never have picked up Jack Ford's onions, she wouldn't have touched one of them; but he would have expected her to. And such an unchivalrous attitude of mind naturally annoyed her. When he talked of forming a non-investigating alliance with me, she knew I ought not to be on in this scene, while she and Jack Ford sparred; and I knew it too. She is clever. She didn't cheapen herself by continuing to flirt with Jack Ford; she disassociated herself from both of us and left us to watch her performing alone.

"I never make compacts with anyone," she murmured. "There is something about a compact which calls to me to break it, instanter; my own compacts or other people's. A compact seems to defy me to do my worst."

"You are a buccaneer and body-snatcher," said Jack Ford trying to be severe, which pleased her.

"The weed which springs from unearned increment, I think you put it yesterday," mocked the girl, oh, so daintily. "Why don't you pull me up, if I'm such a plague and nuisance? Why don't you exterminate me?"

"You try it!" said her melting, dewy eyes. How she mocked him, aloof and yet so near. He couldn't help looking at her.

"Of course it's not your fault," said he, weakly for Jack Ford. "And some pests are much more unpleasant, though I'm hanged if that isn't the mischief of you. When one wants to get rid of a pest, one can do it."

"But I'm a pest you rather like?" said the girl, still mocking.

Jack Ford answered in a way that made me burn.

"We've outgrown the habit of eating raw meat or drinking ourselves under the table *every* night," said he. "The day may come when we shall see beyond the clothes and body of a woman. You'll have the vote soon, Carol; and all your children will be brought up to professions."

"But I'm going to marry into the peerage," said Carol, "and have lots of little peeresses; the world will always want peeresses to open its bazaars, especially pretty ones. Though perhaps opening bazaars will become a profession someday." She was standing up now, putting on her hat; she kept her eyes upon the business in hand, and her voice was that of an innocent baby's, but I felt she was hitting hard. She isn't the sort of person to be naturally innocent about anything, especially as Jack Ford had meant to tease her.

"First catch your peer," said he.

Carol wrapped a filmy veil around her face and fastened it with concentration.

"If you wouldn't be caught by a great horrible ruffian of a Socialist," said Carol, answering him in a murmur so low I could only just hear. I don't think there's anything she'd stop at saying, when flirting.

Jack Ford coloured to his hair, and for the first time in our acquaintance looked silly. Carol continued to tie her veil with difficulty, and finally turned to Jack Ford, and bent her head, showing the dearest white neck. "Please," said she, standing drooping before him.

"I'm no hand at that sort of thing," said he.
"It's woman's work. Here, you have a try."

Carol turned her head ever so little towards me, and waited with no change in her drooping submissiveness. I tied her veil as best I could. The scent of her was like a flower.

Then she turned to the glass and met Jack Ford's eyes in it, with a sweet level gaze of invincible defiance.

"You imagine you can escape me, do you?" said the eyes. "You think you're beyond me. Wriggle away, try it, that's all."

She was so unsnubbable. I should think any man would be provoked and stimulated. Even a common-sense man. A woman would always be a little afraid of her. She would take anything she wanted, and as she said, she would not scruple to break compacts, or cause other people to break theirs. Buccaneer is a good name for her. When the hat was settled, she gave me the soupçon of a bow and smile, quite enough notice for her to take of me,—and said good-bye to Jack Ford, holding out her hand to him with soft appealing eyes as if she were sorry she had been bad. Then

she trailed towards the door. As she passed the table where my violets stood, she gathered up the bunch and rested her face on them; then thrust them in her coat, and flashed the tiniest sparkle at him. "Loot," said she, and vanished through the door with him at her heels.

I've seen a cat flash out its paw like that.

It was the cheek of the thing that made my heart bump up and down—the violets weren't much but I'd brought them for Jack Ford, and I felt she took everything.

I don't know when I've been more surprised than when he came back with the violets in his hand. He didn't say a word about her or the incident, just put them back into their pot, and came up to the fireplace sticking a violet in his buttonhole, and asking if I'd have some more coffee. But I felt stupidly shy when she'd gone, and didn't like to stay.

I wonder who she is.

### CHAPTER III

### JASMINE AT KEW

March 2nd.

March has come in like a lion. There have been heavy rains, but this morning the wind was sweeping the streets so that they dried before one's eyes; great white clouds puffed and blew through the azure sky; and the light caught on the glistening buildings so that they shone like golden palaces. Everyone walked briskly, as if an adventure might come at any corner. No one could plod along to-day, with that great wind stirring one up and coming in flopping gusts, and hustling one and bustling one and setting one's pulses tingling until one felt glowingly alive and eager to hurl oneself against the hardest task that could be given.

To-day, the people seemed on the top of London, triumphing, instead of being ground up or pressed down or trodden under. The clouds were like flapping banners, mighty as the banners of crowds should be. Spring was coming in with drums and cymbals, it was a day when great ideas should be born, and when I came into the office, and met Mr. Richard, flushed and sparkling, the splendid news he had, seemed worthy of the day.

Mr. Grainge has a new scheme, a philanthropic one; the Alliance is to start a fund for colonizing the territory it is acquiring; a magnificent Settlers' Aid Society. Old soldiers and sailors, small farmers, engineers, picked men are to be chosen to people the new stretches of our Empire. They are to start with tools and seed and implements and barns and houses. The nation is to send out its advance guard properly equipped for once.

The mighty wind seemed sweeping through the office as Mr. Richard told me; Mr. Grainge has gathered together the shreds of the Almost Donefor Scheme, and breathed new life into it. For, if we can be sure of waiting crowds of settlers with the Alliance-provided capital, the land we want will be certainly acquired. Oh, but it's good to work with men.

Miss Patten had come in pinched and sniffy; since her admirer has disappeared she has had a chronic cold and though she takes a mournful interest in her "Snippets" still, she doesn't accept it as religiously as she did. This morning she was reading "What a Girl May and May not Accept from Men," and listened to Miss Beckle's very different opinions on the subject supinely. The glorious day hadn't produced any effect on her; she was pottering along, busy with her own little affairs, and when I told her of the Great Idea, she only stabbed her typewriter and said she hoped I should have to do the duplicating. Once, she would at least have wondered what life as a settler's wife would be like.

Women are chilly, in every sense.

But they don't matter. Mr. Richard is such a comrade; we have become friends ever since he sent the violets, though it was very embarrassing for the first two days as he would not give me a chance to thank him. But finally I managed to; and since then "Further orders," has been a joke of ours.

It is jolly to have someone who understands the little things that interest me, as well as the big ones.

He was asking this morning what I did on Saturdays. When I told him I was going to the river-

bank at Kew, it turned out that was his favourite spot. Most people are content to stay in the gardens, but he knows my little gate; and leaves the conservatories and the flowering trees and the smooth labelled beds and lawns to those who like Nature in a high collar and cuffs. We prefer the scrambling, broken towpath and the fields and swollen, turgid water that refuses to be neat and decorous or anything but its undisciplined powerful self.

Father taught me to go out on Saturdays, whatever sort of weather it is, and I'm so glad I've got into the habit of taking tramps. It's less expensive than matinées.

Besides one has to rush off to a matinée; and I can tidy my room and start for my tramp when I want to.

It would be funny to meet Mr. Richard at Kew. I suppose we should bow formally, as if we didn't work together all the week and share the same ideals, and look at everything from exactly the same point of view. How imprisoned we all are, in our different cells! I wish a wind could come some day and blow through the miserable compartments and crack them up and send us all rushing together—all those who had common aims

and interests,—to see as much as ever they wanted of each other.

# Evening.

The wind has blown us together. He was on the bridge across the moat, looking down into the mud. I can't help feeling he wasn't as surprised to see me as he said he was, because I had told him I was coming. But perhaps he doesn't take things in; anyway it doesn't matter. We are friends outside as well as in the office. He accompanied me quite naturally. And oh, it was heaven, heaven.

It's so much more fun to have someone to talk to.

The river-bank teemed with energy to-day. Nice hatless boys tramped along with girls in soft felt hats and short skirts and thick boots; or groups of boys in shorts trained for running, and crews were out on the water. Jolly, wiry little terriers snuffed and padded around their masters and the wind tumbled the clouds about and sent them swirling in broken ranks across the sky, and slapped the water, and rumpled the trees, and everything was bursting with life and newness. I loved the mud and broken bank and crossing-places where we had

to go in single file. I loved the grey cold water, that hurled itself down to the sea, and the keen cold air, and the moistness and wetness. One felt so hardy and impervious to the worst the weather could do. Though the first part of the walk, everything was golden and gleaming and blue.

It was so strange and jolly to be together, and find out what our private selves are like. I was introduced formally to Binkie, the dearest white pup, whom Mr. Richard calls his "hound"; and we talked about Cookham. And Mr. Richard loves dripping toast, and stays at a little pub where they give you plates full, piping hot, and the river babbles under the window.

He has the loveliest voice, it's so eager and public-schooly; and his eyes glance at one now and then in such a funny way as if he's letting you into some delightful joke that's a secret from everyone else; but he is so positive and vigorous, so well set-up and handsome and well kept, so charmingly sure of himself, so used to heaps of friends, that there's a feeling of insecurity under the joy of being with him. Chance threw us together this afternoon but I realized all the time how little he belonged to me. It felt as if thousands of people and interests were plucking him

away. He was going to this place and that; he rode and motored and danced and sculled and punted and fished, and did everything that young men with heaps of money and friends and health amuse themselves with.

Just as he threw himself into the Alliance work and schemes, he pitchforked himself into the fun of the fair outside. I dwindled into the puniest, feeblest specimen of humanity beside him. And I wouldn't let myself be happy when he looked down on me in a big-brotherly way, and said he must come and wake up my sky parlour.

The sun went in, on our way back, and everything became peculiarly grey in consequence; besides, it's never so much fun coming back as starting. Suddenly, out of the grey wall, there broke a branch of dull unnoticeable green, starred with flowers, each one open and candid and bright against the dulness. We both exclaimed at the brave yellow things, caring not a bit for the wind or cold but flourishing as gaily as if it were summer. And then he said something which will make me always happy, however solitary and away from things I am.

"You shine out in the office like that," said he; he blurts out remarks sometimes as if he's afraid, and dares himself to do it, and then gets very busy whistling to the hound.

I felt shy, too, but happy. Stupidly happy. The sort of happiness idiots like Miss Patten feel, I'm afraid.

"I'm awfully keen on jasmine," said I. "It's such a winter flower."

"You can have all sorts of flowers in winter," said Mr. Richard.

"Yes, if you can pay for them," said I. "But the early narcissi always look pinched and nipped, the jasmine can stand the fiercest sort of winds and the most biting cold, and yet it smiles away as if it hadn't the least idea what a rotten time it was really having."

"Like you, eh?" said Mr. Richard, glinting at me, and I wanted to cry or something; because however kind he is, he is so terribly far away, and it's no use pretending we are truly friends.

"I like red roses in winter, deep dark roses that scent the room out," said he; "I should like to bury you in them, just for once. There's nothing so ripping as suddenly having enough of something you've only had teasing little snatches of, especially when everything is against your having it and you have to overturn everything that is, to get it.

Don't you want things you've no chance of getting and no right to have?"

As he spoke, I wanted them most awfully.

His voice made me hot and shivery, as if he were saying something he had no business to. It is the daring way in which he speaks. We walked on without saying anything for a bit, he very busy with Binkie, and then he blurted out, "Do you like roses?"

"Of course," said I.

"I could never be sure what you'd like; now with most girls I can tell to a T," said Mr. Richard. "But you're just a packet of surprises. It was awfully sweet of you not to be angry about those violets, but I could have sworn you would have been."

"Oh dear, ought I to have been?" said I, for it was such an awful thing to have thanked him warmly if he had expected better things from me.

"You ought to have felt exactly what you did, and thanked me in just that way, only not one girl in a million could have done it," said Mr. Richard, and because I couldn't look at him, he looked at me, almost as if he were forcing me to look up. "Whenever you look up at me in the office, I shall see those flowers," he went on

because somehow, he knew I couldn't say anything back now, it was like a spell. "I shall call you Jasmine to myself; do you mind—much?"

We were coming up from the river, through a lane between high walls, walking slowly, shut off from everything.

I couldn't help him calling me anything to himself. But I knew it wouldn't do. There must be discipline in an office; we must respect authority; Mr. Grainge and Mr. Richard cannot mix up with people like myself. I knew Mr. Richard ought to think of me as Miss Blunt, but it was so lovely to hear him call me "Jasmine," I have such a horrid name. But "Jasmine," glorifies what I am, so that I needn't mind being insignificant.

Oh, how dreadfully brave one has to be to do the right thing in small matters. I wasn't brave enough to point out to him what in my heart, I knew.

He said "Jasmine," again, looking down at me as if he were daring me to be angry; it was so much easier to laugh.

"Now I could have sworn you would be angry," said Mr. Richard, "You are a surprise packet . . . Jasmine."

But I hadn't felt angry; it was lovely of him to

think of me like that. And one can't do right always.

A drizzling rain was starting as we came out into the old-fashioned green round which the Jane Austen houses sit in their little gardens. The way they have been smeared over with the screaming, shrieking, money-making rush is such a picture of the age. It is quite painful to see those sedate, genteel old houses covered with placards inviting people to come in and partake of tea and watercress, every placard trying to scream louder than its neighbour, and waiters on the pavement flapping huge table-napkins and bawling invitations to come in.

Mr. Richard strode through them with a disgusted air; the waiters said such dreadful things to — or rather, at us; as if we were a Bank Holiday couple. There were taxis on the bridge, and Mr. Richard beckoned one, and then turned to me and apologized for not being able to stay longer or see me home.

"You must let me pack you up like a parcel, addressed With Care," said he.

It was senseless to be miserable. But he was being swept away from me—his world was claiming him—and I was insignificant again. The taxi

had started from the rank; I just had to pull myself together. It was no business of Mr. Richard's how I got home, any more than it was my business to know where he was going now. We had met by accident, our ways had led together for a blissful time, and now we must part in a dignified way.

"I have somewhere to go," said I, "and things to do. Thanks all the same."

"But you haven't an umbrella," said Mr. Richard.

"I've nothing on to hurt," said I; "Good-bye."

The taxi had drawn up; if Mr. Richard protested there, on the kerb, it would look as if we were quarrelling. I smiled and nodded as much like a sister or cousin as possible and went off. In a minute his taxi whirled past, and I smiled again at him. But oh, it was wet and cold, and the bus that trundled through Hammersmith was so smelly and steamy inside. Hammersmith is a dreary, dreary thoroughfare on a wet March afternoon. Sometimes wet weather is good fun; one marches through it daring the rain to do its worst, and the shining streets and dripping houses and hurrying, splashing people stimulate one.

And some days when I have to hold my hat and duck my head I feel splendidly hardy and

heroic, as if I were going into battle with the band playing.

But the weather that's difficult to enjoy is a dull drizzle that makes everyone peevish and chilled; especially when you start with no fight in you. The weather has a way of matching moods; although the day father died, was the most perfect June day I have ever known, and his wretched, unsuccessful life seemed mocked by every leafy tree and puff of careless, snowy cloud.

To-day the dreary scene was in harmony with my greyness; London was starved and dull and cheerless, and by the time I reached Battersea, I marvelled that people were fools enough to live at all. Where's the sense of living if you don't enjoy it? As I looked up those long, long flights of stairs, I scarcely had the heart to climb them; there was only my lonely little sky parlour at the top.

Surely whoever planned this world, never built us to be shut up, each by himself, with no one to say a friendly word of cheer in the black moments? Unless we were built for the express purpose of being as miserable as possible. And that isn't our purpose in life!

After the bursting energy and fulness of the

river, it was wretched to enter that desolate, shutup building, always emptier than usual on Saturdays and Sundays. I nearly cried when I opened
the door of my dingy room, so far away from
everyone. I hadn't bothered to light the fire
when I came home at dinner-time, and the place
was icy cold. I believe it was the thought of those
brilliant little flower stars still out in the rain and
dark, ready to smile again to-morrow, that kept
me from huddling into bed then and there and
crying my heart out. But I mustn't be beaten by
the cold and dark either, and I foraged about for
something to eat though I wasn't particularly
hungry. And then I came on Mr. Jones' kipper!

Directly I saw it, I heard Mr. Jones saying, in his confidential purring way: "Keep it against a meal when you want a bit of comfort." I had gone into his little shop yesterday, for something for supper, and he had pressed me to take the pair for three halfpence and save a halfpenny. Mr. Jones always cheers me; he is never at a loss for something seasonable to say, and his Yorkshire accent makes the funny things he says sound funnier. His green grocery twinkles with goodwill; his boxes are beautifully arranged, his fish glistens like his grinning face; and if he hands you a bag

of oranges you feel he goes with you all the way and enjoys your enjoyment of each one. Last night, as he slapped the kippers into their paper, he almost smacked his lips. And he beamed when I paid him my three halfpence, and told me a halfpenny saved was a halfpenny gained, and that I'd never regret it, as if my good bargain made him happy.

Directly I thought of the kipper I began to feel hungry and happier, and when my frying-pan began to sizzle, the homey feeling of my sky parlour came back, and I thoroughly enjoyed my tea.

I have been thinking a lot about classes to-night. Some people are independent enough not to be troubled by their labels. I can't imagine Mr. Jones resenting being called a shopkeeper. He is that and his ambition, I should fancy, is to be a good one. I used to think there was nothing I would rather be than a business girl. But to-night, I can't help thinking of that girl, Carol. I believe I could look pretty if I dressed like her. Though I should never be able to mock at men as she does.

How strange it would be to meet a man like

Mr. Richard at a dance; how exciting to motor and ride and golf with him—I suppose lots of girls do. And in the office we talk of money and stocks and shares, and through the window we look on chimney tops, and the air is full of smuts. One can't get to know people properly indoors.

It seems unfair that some girls should be scented and decked out beautifully and taught to dance and given heaps of time for pleasure and heaps of opportunities for meeting men like Mr. Richard through no particular merit of their own, but just because they've been born into a certain class. If father hadn't quarrelled with his people I might have been brought up like that. From when I was tiny I can remember how angry mother was because he wouldn't go to see them. He ought not to have consigned me to the mercies of people like Aunt Minnie. He ought to have held on to his people for my sake. Now he and mother are dead, I can never get in touch with them. I am set down forever with girls like Miss Beckles and Miss Patten.

It's funny that Mr. Jones doesn't mind being set down in a green-grocer's shop. He says its the grandest place in the world for getting in touch with people. He enjoys being useful as much as I used to enjoy being useful at the Alliance.

Seems to me, one always gets miserable when one starts wanting what one hasn't got. At the present minute, I'm a mass of wants. I want to be pretty, to wear elegant provoking clothes, to flirt with my eyes, to do just what I want at the moment; I've got the picture of that girl in my mind all the time. And yet she didn't look truly happy. I wish someone would take me by the scruff of my neck and kick me. I deserve it.

## CHAPTER IV

### JASMINE IN THE WOOD

March 7th, Sunday night.

WHEN one has been used to thinking about oneself all one's life as an indistinct, humdrum little female, it is almost impossible to wake up to the fact that one is of value. Some people have the gift of looking at themselves, and seeing themselves as an interesting type. Miss Patten considers herself ideally domestic and Miss Beckles doesn't recognize her pasty skin and unhealthy big black eyes; she is always picturing herself prancing about in the costumes she sees at matinées, and she walks with a swagger as if she really did prance about on the stage every evening.

To-day so many beautiful remarks have been made to me, that I must recognize the fact that I . . . am . . . a . . . person.

I am someone people look at and wonder about and want to know, someone who pleases people with her looks and voice. Even my little sky parlour is considered an interesting home.

I want to be confident that there is something in me that is special and peculiar and valuable; or otherwise I should be trembling with fear; I believe I am afraid underneath all the time.

Is it possible that I can do anything for Mr. Richard? Oh, is it possible?

This morning came, just the same as other Sundays. The sunlight was jolly, and I had plenty of mending, and new braid to put on my skirt, but somehow I couldn't take the usual pleasure in getting ahead with everything, ready for the week. I wanted the day to be over; it felt empty and interminably long. So I didn't bother to get up, and when I did, shuffled about half-dressed and didn't feel I wanted breakfast. I hadn't washed-up from last night and the room was untidy.

Isn't there some proverb or something about always being ready in case Somebody might come? For while I was just beginning to brush my hair a tremendous knocking sounded on my door. I scurried up my hair, anyhow; it isn't the sort of hair that will scurry up, either; it's so long and soft; then I slipped on my big coat and opened the door. There stood a Messenger Boy with a huge

box. He popped it in my hand, gave me a paper to sign, and stared in at the room like a nasty little animal. The bed wasn't made, and the pans were strewn about the floor and grate, it was all too awful.

I shut the door in his face, but he'd seen.

I knew whom it was from, of course. Long-stemmed roses, a little tired, poor things, but oh, so sweet and red. Beneath them, was a note, sealed heavily, with "Roses in exchange for Jasmine" written on it. The room seemed going round and round; it was as if he had come in. I put the letter against my face, and it smelt of smoke, just a little. It was my own and there was no one to see; but I scarcely dared open it. He was going to say something again to me, that belonged to me alone. He does write unexpected sort of letters, not a bit shy, but as if he was glinting at one, out of the corner of his eye, all the time.

"R. M. is sick of streets and pavements. How jolly it would be to find Jasmine in a nice bare wood, where we could go squelching through leaves? Did you know woods are quite warm in winter? A chariot will be waiting at Hyde Park Corner at half-past ten this morning. Further orders later.

"A JASMINE DEVOTEE."

It was nearly ten.

I flew into my coat and skirt, and twisted my hair up anyhow; the room had to be left as it was. I had only time to dash the roses into the jug. I was half-way down before I remembered I hadn't locked the door. But I couldn't go back.

Then I simply tore through Battersea; I missed my bus by a few seconds, it was just disappearing round the corner. On the bridge I came on a stray taxi and jumped in. I didn't care a hang. It was striking half-past as we whizzed into the golden open space where everyone was meeting everybody else this morning. I got out at the corner; as I was paying, something slid along the gutter and stopped plump by us. Then Mr. Richard was shaking hands in a queer, excited way and laughing.

"Hullo," said he, "I never thought of you coming like that."

"I missed my bus," said I. I couldn't take in anything properly, except that I was with him. For as we came down on the crowded streets, I had felt hopeless of finding him.

"I was looking for your face, shining out at the corner, somewhere, and you sweep up in a taxi," said he, as if he were pleased. "Come along. I know such a jolly wood."

Then we got into the other taxi: and sped away together.

I thanked him for the roses; not very warmly, because the silly shyness wouldn't go. I'd have given anything to have been able to smile back at him; but I could only sit up like a prig. My hands were as cold as ice, and my heart felt dithery.

"I don't believe you really care for roses," said Mr. Richard. I felt him staring hard at me. "I don't care much for them either, now. I shall always send you Jasmine in future, or something white and sturdy. How about real wild lilies of the valley; you know, the rather small ones with strong stems, that smell so divinely. I'll never, never, never send hothouse flowers to you again. Do forgive me . . . Jasmine."

"You were going to think of me as that," said
I. I couldn't thank him for flowers he hadn't sent
—he might be only talking; he's the sort of person
who talks easily, and it would be impertinence to
expect him to remember what he promised.

"I am thinking of you as Jasmine," said Mr. Richard in the sweetest way, as if he were surprised that I had taken him to task for not thinking of me. I had to laugh.

"But you're calling me Jasmine," said I.

"At present," said he. "There are all sorts of names I want to call you, but you're a rather formidable sort of person. You have such a way of not looking at a fellow. I don't like it. Look here, have I a smut on my nose?"

He hadn't, but he laughed and laughed.

"I cannot make out if you are very wise or very young," said he. "Your eyes open exactly like flowers."

He wasn't in the least shy now; only big-brotherly and friendly. But somehow, I liked him better when he was shy. When he said such lovely things, I couldn't feel able to keep him. It was so easy for him to get on with people. One could see it in the way he laughed, and took possession of the person he was with.

I discounted everything he said, as he said it. "He has said that sort of thing to millions of people, or he never would say it to you, it is his way of being pleasant," said I to myself, and I tried to think about the ugly little streets we were now rushing through. Small shops, and rather larger shops, and villas with small gardens, and then stretches of mournful waste ground or smoky fields. London isn't prettily approached. One ought to come into a great city, through proces-

sional avenues, and splendid gates, and ordered thoroughfares, and quarters for every sort of citizen, all arranged tidily and beautifully, and adding to the charm of one another; but when one enters London, one has to climb over its ash-heap and dust-bin, and one leaves it with an impression of its squalor and dirt instead of its riches and beauty.

"I say, I am a silly ass; now I've offended you," said Mr. Richard. I couldn't tell him what was depressing me, because I hardly knew myself. It was easier to say I hated the little houses, than to explain he was much too much for me. "I'm going to talk about Binkie," said Mr. Richard, lapsing into his ordinary self again. He talked about footer after that, and told me about clubs I'd never heard of, and men whose names went out of my mind as fast as he put them in; and he told me about last year's Henley and what he hoped for, this, and again the events thud-thudded as he discussed them, and I couldn't feel a spark of interest. But I loved being with him, and it was easy to say, "Yes, I see!" "Did they, really?" "How splendid!" He told me I was a ripping listener.

I didn't mind the dulness of the conversation.

I love to hear his voice, whatever he says; and men like girls who listen well, better than girls who talk, sometimes. Even if it had been more tedious and unintelligible than it was, I preferred hearing his conversation to anyone else's; I like him to be absorbed in all the things men ought to care for.

And oh, it was lovely when the houses broke away at last, and after clustering together in vain attempts at being little towns, scattered and disappeared, and we were speeding through heathercovered ridges, with the country rolling away into haze and sunshine. It seemed incredible that we had left the city behind so easily. To spirit me away like this, made Mr. Richard more kingly than ever. But men are kings; they order and do everything, and we are lucky to please them. For a moment, I wondered what Miss Beckles or Miss Patten would feel like, to be in my place. Thinking of their rapture, helped me to enjoy it more; for the slight depression would not entirely go, it was as if I were being furiously happy for a short time only, and the whole of the happiness was soon to be snatched away for ever. Yet it has been a wonderful day; even though I never have another like it.

Instead of looking about for a cottage or inn

where we should be likely to get something cheap for lunch. Mr. Richard looked about for the best hotel, and at last we turned into the yard of a quaint old coaching inn, where in spite of the garage and motors everything had a post-horsey flavour. We were conducted into a dark sittingroom with a monster sideboard, and fortunately a crackling fire, and Mr. Richard disappeared to order lunch while I tried to arrange my hair by the aid of the sideboard glass. Whether it was the wind or excitement, I don't know, but I looked wild and strange; for the first moment I thought I looked pretty, until I looked for the pale mouth and frowning eyebrows, and found them, alas! It was only the flush of coming in and seeing myself unexpectedly that had given the pretty look. I smoothed my hair as best I could, and wished with all my heart it was golden or red or some distinctive colour instead of the usual nutbrown. But a pal doesn't have to be pretty. Dear me, it still seems great cheek to think of myself as a pal of Mr. Richard's.

Lunch was rather jolly, Mr. Richard enjoyed it so, and there was such an amusing cruet-stand on the table, a monster with a dozen bottles in, each holding some different sauce. Mr. Richard tried them all. It was very cosy although I think we both felt strange at sitting there in a room with no one else. We only seem to know each other well occasionally. Part of the time we become stiff and awkward and don't have anything to say.

Mr. Richard has a trick of jumping up and looking for things, as if he refuses to feel shy, but that only makes the shyness more conspicuous, in a way.

It was much nicer when we got out of doors, and set out for the famous wood. We had to cut across a field, and directly people are doing something together, like climbing fences, everything becomes natural. We might have known each other for years by the time we had stumbled over a ploughed field, and got our boots clodded until we almost stuck to the earth, each step we took. But the wood was worth any trouble in finding it.

The low sun was slanting through the trees, and after we had gone a little way, the ground ran down into a sheltered dip, into which the sun came streaming. The leaves were goldy-brown, the tree trunks grey and green and purple, and the deliciously open sky was brilliant blue. We didn't squelch through the leaves, they rustled softly as if they welcomed us, and when we came on a

fine old stubby root bang in the sun, Mr. Richard proposed we should sit down.

Oh, how still it was! A wood is rather scuffley and chirpy in summer, but to-day there didn't seem a single living thing abroad except ourselves. The sunlight was moderate and calm, not the sleepy baking heat in which one sits and basks. I don't know that I've ever felt happier.

Mr. Richard sat huddled up in his great coat with his hands rammed into his pockets, and his cap well over his forehead, whistling very sweetly. One could see he was loving it all. I jumped when he said, "Tell me about yourself."

"Oh, bother myself," said I, for the chief point of being out of doors is that one forgets everything horrid.

"But I want to know," said Mr. Richard, pulling himself round so that he could look at me, and then he added: "Yes, you've come out like those jolly little beggars we saw yesterday, smiling away on the wall. Why don't you smile all the time? You couldn't believe what a difference it makes. Go on. Tell me how you came to our office."

"But what a funny thing to ask," said I.
"There's no story about it."

"Then why are you so different from the other

girls?" said Mr. Richard. "You're simply a different make. I saw it the first time you came into my room; if you can tell a well-bred dog or horse, you can jolly well tell the same thing of a girl. Why are you in the City?"

"Because I love it," said I. My cheeks were burning, I didn't feel happy a bit, for only half of me is well-bred. And I didn't want to tell Mr. Richard about the other half.

"You love it!" said Mr. Richard. "Good Lord! Love grubbing away in that poky little room upstairs with two halfbaked . . . My dear girl, talk sense—"

"I love every bit of it," said I, burning again as he spoke of Miss Beckles and Miss Patten. Despising people oneself is different from hearing them scorned in such a horrid way.

"But what is there to love?" asked Mr. Richard.

"Don't you love it?" said I, with the first shock of disappointment; it was terrible to hear him speak as if the Alliance didn't count.

"Oh, I dunno; yes, I like it all right," said Mr. Richard, and I breathed again; men can't talk about the things they really care for, not easily, at any rate. "But then I have all the interesting things to do; I don't sit there and take orders."

But what does it matter what one's part is in a glorious undertaking? The tiniest part of it can feel part of it, and love the great ideas all are working for, and triumph in their triumph; the ideas couldn't be carried out either, if some people weren't there to lick stamps and envelopes, and carry them to post, to say nothing of writing out the letters. What use would a landscape gardener be, if there weren't men to dig and sow? And what use would men like Sir Mordaunt and Mr. Grainge and Mr. Richard be, if there weren't an army of ready, loyal workers to execute what they think out?

Some people have to earn their living by petty humdrum businesses but we are working for grand ideals, and however faint the grasp we have of them, we under-workers, yet their grandeur permeates the details of the daily round. A single letter may establish the Empire a little more firmly in some far corner of the earth; to keep up a reliable speed may mean a little more peace, and thereby, a little more freedom to think out plans, for a great mind like Mr. Grainge's. One does the work because one loves it for its own sake, but it's fine sometimes to think of its meaning, to try and catch the vision that the leaders see; no drudgery seems drudgery then.

Since I've worked with Mr. Richard, everything has been so much more seeable, too.

I tried to tell him this. And how splendid it was that he had come to the Alliance, and Mr. Grainge had such a lieutenant; and how I loved doing anything, anything I could to help. They couldn't keep me there too late, or give me too much to do.

Mr. Richard didn't look at me, now, and I almost forgot him, in a way; it was so lovely to be able to speak to the Alliance in person, and say a fraction of what I felt.

For a minute I thought he was bored, for men don't like to talk shop out of hours; but he was only considering; and presently he said, "That's topping" in the nicest voice.

He whistled again for a minute, as if he were still thinking, and then pulled himself together, and said, "Fancy you thinking all that of Grainge!"

"Don't you?" said I.

"Yes, but I can see what a big chap he is; my father doesn't, you know; jolly few people do; they can't understand a man with his flowery way of putting things, being practical; and they think he aims too high. But no one gets anywhere if they don't aim high. What does my father want to do? Nothing, except grub shekels together. Grainge

likes to feel his fingers on the Universe. I tell you, he's the biggest personality alive to-day, and will scratch his mark higher than city level. You watch!"

"Then why are you surprised at my thinking about him as I do?" said I.

"I suppose because you're a girl," said Mr. Richard, smiling down on me in his kingly manner. "One doesn't expect girls to like men for that sort of thing."

"It's the only thing I like them for," said I.

"You are a surprise packet," said Mr. Richard; "By Jove, there's some point in making a girl like you, . . ." He broke off with a giggle, that was very jolly, because he was obviously on the point of saying something friendly. But he didn't take his eyes off me, only stared and stared. "I suppose that's why it's so ripping to be with you," he went on; "you make a fellow feel in form, as if he can lick anything and anyone; you expect him to, don't you? Like when you pulled me up for worrying about the land scheme. You said Grainge would see it through, and this last move looks as if it's going. He's in, for all he's worth; he's backing himself for once against the governor, and he's got to pull it off."

"And he will," said I. "It isn't as if he's selfish; it's glorious how he can think of other people when he's so worried. Who else would trouble about the settlers? Who else would think of all those tiny private individuals? Imagine the trouble he'll have in organizing such a complicated charity, and yet he thinks nothing of it, but flings himself into it, heart and soul, and gives his services for nothing. And for what? For the sake of helping hundreds of men who'll never know he's done it; and for England."

Mr. Richard continued to look at me in rather a queer way; it was idiotic of me to want to cry, but when I think of the bigness of great men's hearts, and their unrewarded, unknown labours, I do get choky. One can at least adore such people.

Mr. Richard is a surprise packet, too; after nursing his chin for a minute or two, he said, "You'd make a topping pal."

"I haven't one," said I.

"A man would be in luck to have you for a friend," said Mr. Richard, still thoughtful. "You're such an extra-special sort of pal; one who'd fight to the last ditch. I knew you'd make a pal like that."

He wasn't fooling or teasing or daring any more, but quiet and serious; the wood was stiller than ever. The sunlight was pale yellow, like the skies. There wasn't so much of it now, and the air was colder. I sat still, for I'd nothing to say. I couldn't believe such happiness. And yet at the same time, it was true. Mr. Richard suddenly reached out, and put his hand on mine.

"Pals, eh?" said he. "Is it a bargain?"

I couldn't speak, but I nodded.

Mr. Richard kept his hand on both mine, with a confronting squeeze; his hand is so big and strong.

"I'm an extremely jealous person and like keeping my friends to myself, in water-tight compartments; I shall keep you in a water-tight compartment, so that when I'm bored or worried, I can come and always find you. Will you promise to be there?"

I nodded again.

"All to myself," said Mr. Richard. "And just you and I will know, I hate people to talk."

My head went up; as if I should ever speak of this to a soul, if I knew anyone to talk to, which I don't.

"I don't talk," said I.

"Bless you," said Mr. Richard. "I warn you

I believe I'm going to get very fond of you, I do get awfully fond of my pals." The depression came up in a big wave at that. For he was so far away, really.

"I shall want to know heaps of things about yourself, and I never tell my pals about myself, so you see you're going to have the best of the bargain there," said Mr. Richard. "Unless I have a blue fit, and then I shall just tell you I want bucking up. And now and then, when you're doing my letters, I shall think of you as Jasmine, eh?"

"Not at the office," said I quickly.

"Why that's where we're the best pals of all," said Mr. Richard, "Isn't it, oh fellow-Graingite?"
His hand was still on mine.

Somehow, I knew we must keep our friendship quite, quite apart from the office.

"I don't think we ought to think about each other then," said I. "Only about what we're doing. I can't be friends unless you agree to that."

"What, not when your eyes smile out and your funny frowning little face uncrinkles?" said Mr. Richard. "Sometimes you're such a solemn little Jasmine, without a single bit of yellow shewing; every bit of you rolled up; I was awfully afraid of

you till the first time you opened your eyes at me and smiled. Then I've never been afraid of you again. The tighter you shut up, the more fun it is teasing you, until your eyes open. Do you know, I'm becoming very clever at making you smile?"

"But you mustn't think of such things at the office," said I, half happy, but knowing all the time, he must not think these thoughts at the office.

"I mustn't think of them here a second longer, or I don't know what'll happen," said Mr. Richard suddenly letting go my hand and jumping up. "To say nothing of the fact I want my tea."

Oh, I was stiff. Mr. Richard had to pull me up. We stamped about to get our feet warm; then Mr. Richard suggested running and took hold of my arm, and bustled me through the wood and over the field till we were weak with laughing.

"You're just as good as a boy," said he. "I should have said you were such a girly-girl, but you're not a bit."

"I love sewing and fussing about my room," said I, and pictured him curled up before the fire in my sky parlour.

"You've got to tell me about your room, and where you live, and some day I shall come to tea, and you shall give me dripping toast. Do you think we shall get dripping toast now? Does dripping come from chickens?"

When we were in the taxi, Mr. Richard put his hand through my arm and took hold of my hand in a comforting, friendly way, as if I did truly and really belong to him, and we had sealed a bargain, and were different now.

He didn't talk much, but stared ahead as if he were thinking, and I daren't interrupt him. Besides, it was so lovely to be speeding along with no trouble, in the gathering darkness. I shut back all the little prickly doubts that would keep trying to get in; it would have been silly to have pulled my hand away when he took it for granted we were real friends now.

He came with me all the way to Battersea, and when we went over the bridge, leaned forward and gave a sigh of joy in the beauty of it all.

"Oh, I do love London," said he. "There's no place like it. One is so absolutely free to do anything one jolly well wants to."

"I like getting out of London, too," said I, for I wanted the solemn wood to stay with me, and every minute was taking it away or trying to; London was going to swallow him up, now; I had no chance of keeping him from London.

"Is this where you live?" said Mr. Richard as we turned into the dark, deserted street. "I say, I believe I'm coming back with you. We shall have to light a fire, shan't we, and forage? I want to have your sort of supper with you, for an experience." My heart thrilled, and then I remembered the state I'd left the room in.

"Not to-night," said I.

"Why not?" said Mr. Richard.

"I can't possibly," said I, and he couldn't get anything else out of me. Finally he turned very cross, and said he shouldn't have come, anyway, as he was dining out, and couldn't possibly disappoint the people, and didn't want to disappoint them either. Which was a great comfort, for after having given me such a perfect day, it seemed too brutal to refuse to have him to supper. I was so relieved at finding he hadn't meant to come, I was scarcely disappointed when I got out of the taxi; and besides the least I could do to show my gratitude, was to smile, as he liked me to smile. To my surprise he only jumped in and slammed the door to, as if he were furious. He put his head out of the other side to give the driver his direction.

I came upstairs feeling the insecurity again; how I have offended him I can not think.

### CHAPTER V

#### THE IMPERIAL ALLIANCE

March 22nd, Monday.

WE are truly friends, after all. I am so separated from Mr. Richard at the office, that it is difficult to think of him as a friend. We were both shy when we met; of course I had told Mr. Richard we must not be friends there, and that explained why he was off-hand. In a way, I was glad. But as the days went on, and he continued to snap out instructions and bury his head in papers and refuse to look at me, I suddenly discovered he was being offended. In a way, this made me happy for it showed we were friends. But I could not say anything, while he was acting as my chief.

It was a relief when he asked how long this was going to go on. I said I didn't know but it was horrid; and he said the horridness was on one side entirely and he couldn't have believed it of me.

We had to have it out then, for we never see each other except at the office. I had offended him dreadfully by refusing to let him come to supper, and smiling when I said good-bye. He said it was a most cruel smile, as if I didn't care a button what became of him. When I told him I was honestly glad he had somewhere else to go, he didn't like it any better, at first. But he admitted it was only sensible to look at the matter in that way; and when I told him my room had been untidy that cheered him up.

I never dreamed that coming to see me could be important to Mr. Richard.

I would not stay and talk as he wished, for there had been scarcely any letters this morning and I knew what Miss Beckles and Miss Patten would think; and finally he said we must meet somewhere and suggested lunch. That could not be, however, for now Miss Patten's admirer has vanished we have returned to our old arrangement, and share scrambled eggs as well as fruit and cream. It was not fair to upset her lunch. He pressed the matter but I could not betray Miss Patten's economies; I don't mind what he knows about me; friends have the right to know everything about each other. I am glad I was firm; this morning he

blurted out, "What an idiot I am. I'm coming to supper to-night, in the famous sky parlour."

Of course I said I should be delighted. He laughed like a schoolboy and said it would be topping, and he should bring the supper and I wasn't to get a thing. He said he should cook whatever needed cooking in the pan which I'd told him of, and not let me do a thing. He was not going to be one of those pals who gave more trouble than they were worth. Half the time, I thought he was rotting, but before I went, he said again, "To-night then; about eight?"

There is still half an hour; I wish there was something I could do but the room is perfect. I have been very extravagant, but flowers do improve things so, and the streets were full of daffodils. Their trumpets stretch out from the mantelpiece in a golden army, as if they are bugling in the spring, or offering welcome to the hero who is coming to join the picture ones: a young, untried hero, full of the strength and courage of the spring; who is my friend.

The fire will be just right in half an hour, the coals are smouldering in a pleasantly smoky, sulky way, on the point of breaking into flame; the green curtains are drawn across the window

for it's cosier that way, but later, we shall part them and look at London in the moonlight; my furniture is polished till it shines like glass and its cheapness doesn't matter; I have put my best teacloth on the table, and laid out my china which is mostly willow pattern, and old-fashioned, and just right for this quaint room; and I have candles instead of the mournful gas, so that my contrivances won't be conspicuous. The brush and bucket won't go under the bed, but they retire into a corner now discreetly. It is a dear little room, and I believe he'll love it, I don't see how anyone could help it; it deserves a friend. To think, of all people, that Mr. Richard should have been given me as a friend.

Eight o'clock.

Mr. Richard has sent a telegram—"Detained." Does that mean he will be late, or isn't coming? He might have put it more clearly.

It's eleven, so he can't be coming. Finis!

March 23rd, Tuesday.

Mr. Richard had run up against an old friend whom he hadn't seen for years, who insisted on

dining with him; and he couldn't get away. He said he was frightfully angry, and had had the dullest evening he had ever spent; he asked when he could come again, but I felt he was trying to be nice to make up for disappointing me, and something in me rose up. I don't think he saw I minded. I hope not. When girls show they mind, it makes me sick. Of course, if I'd said he should never come now, he would have known; so I tried to look as if the idea was mildly pleasant, and said perhaps we could arrange a night next week, or the week after. I didn't explain I was busy, or say anything about myself. I heard Miss Patten do that to her admirer when he hadn't turned up for a week. When men really want to see you, they always turn up. I knew Mr. Richard didn't want to see me very badly; I knew he had millions of friends. It is a great disadvantage to have few friends. I'll never lose an opportunity of making friends. But what opportunity ever will come my way?

# March 30th, Tuesday.

It is something to be friends, even though it's only at the office. Mr. Grainge's scheme is still in the balance, and the philanthropic one isn't

going as it should. Every now and then we get a fillip, enough to make us think that things are moving, but they do not make quite enough of a move. We are a long way off the amount that Sir Mordaunt considers necessary before he will come in. He will not listen to prospects or promises. People with money think that only money counts. Mr. Richard knows that Mr. Grainge ought to be trusted and given a free hand, even if it did seem perilous at first. He is absolutely confident of the ultimate success of the project, and it is naturally very annoying to see a brilliant man hindered and exasperated when Sir Mordaunt has the means to back the enterprise.

I do what I can to cheer Mr. Richard. One must have patience. He told me to-day I helped him, but he hasn't said anything again about coming to see me. He looks worried and as if he's thinking about something else; I wish I could be of more use than I am.

Some women take such a selfish view of men. It makes my blood boil to hear Miss Beckles on the subject. She has become interested in those terrible Suffragettes, and goes to their hateful meetings, and tells us things which make Miss Patten and myself want to throw things at her.

She says the day will come when men will be as subjugated as we are now, and women will rule the world, for they are the higher type. When I think of what men have done, and compare it with the miserable inefficiency of women, I become as bad as a Suffragette, only the other way round. Miss Beckles says men are in a conspiracy to keep women inefficient; but who's preventing Miss Beckles and Miss Patten from taking interest in the Alliance? Miss Patten knows she is typically womanly and weak, but Miss Beckles swaggers worse than ever, not because she is a fascinating woman now (oh, the delusion!) but because she is a woman. I told her to-day every man might strut about because he's a man; she says he does; in a way that's true. But then he is a man.

It's funny how much more intensely women think about things, and how much more things that count, men do. Men have a way of getting out and doing things as a matter of course. Mr. Grainge plays golf regularly, through all this crisis. And Mr. Richard is here, there, and everywhere. To-day he asked if I would like to come to a footer match, which was jolly. I can't think why I said no. I suppose I want to make myself appear important, too, which is very silly, because

I couldn't keep it up if we ever did become friends enough to see much of one another. Then he would find my importance was only pretence, and would despise me. Why can't I take what he naturally wants to give me, and be a fifth-rate friend contentedly? It would be more honest than this pretence of not caring particularly. But after that night, something seems dead. I know he doesn't mean much, and I can't be natural. Sometimes I wish we had never thought of being friends. Every day is disappointing now.

I suppose it's the general depression because the scheme isn't going.

April 1st, Thursday.

Mr. Richard cares for me.

This morning I was still on the outside of things with no greater interest than finishing my blouse, and no anticipation that things would ever be different. When I came out, the gentle freshness of the morning stirred me a little; there was no wind and the sunlight made the streets warm and balmy. The trees were pricking with green, the river was a sheet of sparkling crystals whose facets broke each moment so that the stream

danced as it ran—and smiles broke out on people's faces as they hurried to their work.

There are plenty of growing things in cities, but the country sends such urgent messages just now, that our performance seems nothing at all. Such messages they are, the tight packed baskets lined with moss and crammed with the bounty of the fields and hedges. Ludgate Hill was bright with primroses! However men clutter the ground with bricks and buildings they can't keep the flowers away.

I saw the wet leaves and twiggy tangle where the primroses peeped through. I saw the innocent baby clouds floating over young green fields; and purling leaf-filled streams, busily clearing away the débris of the winter. Our wood was green to-day, and the sunlight was glistening on tiny leaves and flowers, pushing everywhere.

The City had melted away for the moment, and even when I went into Mr. Richard's room, the scent of the primroses was whispering, and every time I looked down on their soft paleness, I saw deep moss and heard water trickling—lap, lap—a steady murmur against pebbles, while high above the baby clouds stood at attention in the blue.

I noticed vaguely that Mr. Richard was look-

ing at me in his queer, furtive way, but to-day I didn't trouble.

I sniffed my primrose when he paused in the middle of a letter; but he stayed so long that I looked up. He was fingering a ruler, and staring at the blotting-paper. Suddenly he said, "Why are you looking like that?"

"Like what?" said I.

"As if you were in a happy trance," said Mr. Richard.

I thought his voice was scornfully angry; I felt myself beginning to blush. I would have died rather than tell him I had been thinking of our wood. My thoughts were no business of his. I bent my head lower and lower, but I knew he saw how red I had become. There was a most dreadful silence.

I had to look up at last. He was holding the ruler in both hands as if he were trying to break it; suddenly he said: "You're driving me mad. If it's someone else, it's only fair to tell me, after the way you've let me, . . . let me—"

The room went round and round; I couldn't say a word. He tapped the desk with the ruler in a funny excited way and said: "We promised to be pals; I've the right to ask."

"Do you mean, am I thinking of something else?" said I. How could I dare to think he meant—what it turned out he did mean; oh, how we have misunderstood each other.

"Rot! You're not as innocent as that," said he. He told me afterwards he was beside himself. I couldn't think of his feelings or behaviour or anything then, I only wanted him to look into my mind and see the truth.

I didn't care if he despised me. Anything was better than being accused of simpering and smiling because I had an admirer. I told him exactly what had been passing through my mind. He looked at me as if he had been released from a nightmare; for a minute I was thankful; then I began to blush again, the look in his eyes was more than friendly. But I wouldn't bend down my head. He should see what I felt. I looked back; hard as it was, I wasn't going to pretend.

"And here I've been jealous and fretting and bothering night and day, and trying to leave you alone, or annoy you, and you've kept on doing your work and cheering me up, as if an idiot like myself couldn't hurt you; and now you come in looking like an angel and when I insult you with the rotten suspicions I've been torturing myself with, you

have the decency to show me what's in your heart. I'm not fit to look. Why are you always making me ashamed of myself? Look here. Are you going to forgive me?"

I shall never forget a single word.

I told him I had nothing to forgive; I looked back at him all the time.

"Oh, come now, that's worse than punishing me," said he. "Look here, we must have this out. Where can we see each other; won't you lunch somewhere? I know an awfully jolly place where we can talk."

I told him the truth why I could not come. Miss Patten is saving for an umbrella. She will have enough next week; I could not upset her plans till then.

Mr. Richard laughed till I was afraid Mr. Grainge would hear. "I have been making an ass of myself," said he. "You are such a brick. I know, I'll let you off early, and we'll scoot down to our wood; try and strike a better bargain this time, eh? One that won't admit of any misunderstandings."

He wouldn't hear of anything but this idea. I was to meet him at the Mansion House at half-past four; then we were to taxi into Surrey.

I knew it was dangerous, but I cannot do right always.

As I stood on the kerb waiting, who should tap me on the back but Miss Beckles; she also had got off early to attend a Suffragette bazaar. She stood there, persuading me to come with her. I waited every second for Mr. Richard to whizz up, without seeing her, but fortunately his taxi stopped a few yards off. There was no course but to lie to Miss Beckles. I told her I must run for a train, and then it turned out she intended to stay there and wait for her bus. I went past the taxi, round the corner, and Mr. Richard understood and picked me up. He was very annoyed. I don't think she saw him, but she might have done, and the incident cast a shadow. Mr. Richard sat back as far as he could, and I felt nervous and strange; we did not talk. It is queer how we go in and out of being friends with one another. One minute, so close, closer to each other than to anyone else in the world; the next, misunderstanding again.

I felt Mr. Richard was repenting his imprudence, and my heart grew heavier until I wished devoutly that we had never come. I tried to think of some, way of getting out of the taxi and returning home and at last I said I had just remembered I had

promised to be in this evening. This was true. I had told Jack Ford I would be at home and would take in a parcel he was expecting.

"You can't back out like that," said Mr. Richard.

"Well, is there any sense in coming when we both know we oughtn't to?" said I.

Mr. Richard is a peculiar person. This made him good humoured again.

"Why, that's the whole point," said he. "Besides, I don't know we oughtn't to; I've simply got to carry you off somewhere, or we shall never understand each other. Haven't you ever wanted to get out of the shafts for a single minute?" He took my hand as he spoke, and gave it a comforting squeeze as if he were taking care of me and I wasn't to worry. I couldn't help smiling back. Besides, it was such fun to be speeding away together and leaving the worries behind. We were passing gardens, and everything was springing and growing; it was natural to lean back and be happy.

"Doesn't the office seem far away?" said I.

"You look so sweet when you're tired," said Mr. Richard. "A man has some sort of chance with you then. No, do stay as you were. I can look at you more comfortably. I like you to look tired and gentle. Now, open your eyes at me, and smile."

I knew he cared, then. But there was still the insecurity. I wanted to pretend not to notice, and look at the scenery as usual; just pretend I was indifferent; something was telling me that would be safer. But I had determined to be true, and so I looked back, and we stayed looking at each other while the taxi rushed on and on as if we were in a dream. The sun was low when we reached the hotel; our room was filled with a bicycling party and the whole place overrun with hot young men in knickerbockers; neither of us wanted tea. We left the taxi and struck out for our wood.

We had a discussion about the way to it, for everything looked different now the leaves were coming. Then we found the ploughed field was covered with young corn, and we could not tramp over it. We went on for some way, looking for a lane, but the road became an avenue of trees and went downhill in the opposite direction. We were both getting a little tired. At last we were in a hollow, where the trees met overhead and fields rose up on either side, and there was no glimpse of our wood. We leant over a gate, discussing the

best plan of getting there. Somewhere far away a cow was lowing mournfully, and now and then a bird cheeped. We were shut in, out of sight and mind of everyone we knew; and the light became fainter and fainter, the green of the grass faded into shadows, the trees pressed down on us; and the peep of sky was chrysophase and made the shadows heavier and more intimate. I wanted to stay there for ever.

We stopped talking, and leant there, as if neither of us had power to move. I could hear Mr. Richard breathing in a funny way, and I was half afraid, and yet at the same time, happy. I knew everything was different. When he suddenly put out his hand, and touched my arm I knew.

Everything is blurred when I think back, although I want to remember every minute. I knew Mr. Richard was going to kiss me, and I knew, with a great rush of relief, that we were safe here, and could do just as we liked; there was no chance of anyone knowing.

Yes, the thing I remember was the feeling of safety at last, although when he took me in his arms, I was afraid. He is so different, how can he care for me? But he does.

As he kissed me, I knew everything depended on him now, I couldn't be happy in any other way than by being with him; and no other friends could ever count; it never had been anything but Mr. Richard from the first time I took down his letters.

Even the Alliance wasn't as important as being loved by Mr. Richard. Although I always loved the Alliance because it is the work of men of Mr. Richard's stamp; real men: men who do things; men who are sportsmen, not who sit around and write and think and mope; men who have a sense of honour. He says what most attracted him to me, is the way I put the office first. He thinks it's fine, that I can understand the bigness and importance of the work he's doing. Most girls are absolutely uninterested and only want you to talk about their eyes and kiss them. But directly he began to know me he saw I wasn't that sort. He saw it in my eyes. They are the truest eyes he has ever looked into; he says he has never known a girl look him square in the face like I do, without the ghost of an invitation. Several times he's been so provoked, he has nearly kissed me. He almost did so in that lane at Kew, only he knew I should hate it then. And he nearly kissed me in our wood only the moment never seemed to come. But to-day he had made up his mind he would not be afraid of me.

Directly we began to talk about the Alliance, he had become interested. It had been rather boring, shut up in the office all day long, when he had been used to outdoor life; I had been a human interest. He says he never looks ahead, but we can think back now, as much as we like.

He says he has been pulled in two all along. After that day in the wood, he had taken himself in hand, but things had gone so badly, he absolutely had to talk things over with someone who understood and who could buck him up. I always buck him up. I have the knack of making a man feel he can do a full day's work. Oh dear! Just to think I have any influence with Mr. Richard.

He was looking forward awfully to having supper in my sky parlour that night, but an old friend really did turn up, and it would have been frightfully difficult to get away, and he thought there was a pretty certain chance of seeing me next evening. But then I put him off. Whenever he is feeling most sure of me, he says I slip away; one minute I am looking up as if I had never looked at anyone except him, and the next day I look at him as if he were a circular I knew by heart. And one minute he feels I would throw over everything I cared for, including my immortal soul, and go with him to the end of the world, and the next day I wouldn't stop typing if I saw him drowning. Even when he is kissing me, he can't be sure that I shan't have repented by next morning and he will find himself in the cold again.

I said, "what is there to repent of, if you really care?"

But he says part of me is not like a girl at all, and he shall never be really happy till he feels I am all girl. It will be his mission to find out the girl in me, so that he will never get left again. At the same time, he loves me for being unlike any girl he has ever met. But he hates women to be unwomanly and he will have to kiss all the hardness in me away, and never be frightened. He has made up his mind not to be frightened now whatever I do.

I don't like it when he calls me hard. I asked him if he thought it unwomanly to show him how much I cared, and he said no. He loved the way I gave myself up like a good child. But I mustn't think of anything except him. He likes me to be interested in the Alliance, because it's his chief

interest too, and it's jolly to be able to talk things out together; but he wants all of me. I said he had it all, and he said he hoped so, but he still felt the coldness, though at the same time, it made me very fascinating, and he never would have lost his head as he has, if I hadn't seemed so unattainable. I told him his unattainability had had the opposite effect on me, for there was no sense in wanting to be friends with someone whom you had no chance of knowing. It had never occurred to me to want to be friends with him till we met at Kew. At which he laughed and said he was not going to be put off by that sort of thing again.

But I had not wanted to be friends with him at first. He was a hero, like Mr. Grainge.

He said wonderful things coming home; I have the eyes of a baby and an angel and a sphinx mixed up together, and my mouth is as firm as the mouth of a statuette.

It isn't nice to be hard.

I asked if he considered Miss Patten womanly; he said, of the most third-rate order.

It is wonderful to be loved. It is a great responsibility. Mr. Richard's happiness depends on me. The worst of it is, I hurt him when I have no idea of doing such a thing. I still feel insecure.

He said he should come home to supper with me to-night, for we haven't yet had a really cosy homey evening together; but as we were planning it, the taxi burred and stopped, and there we were on a country road in the darkness. I couldn't sit there with the chauffeur meddling about under the windows, though Mr. Richard doesn't seem to mind who sees; I said I was stiff and must have a stretch, and when we got out, I insisted on walking up and down to keep warm, and watched what the man was doing. Mr. Richard was angry again, for it was more than an hour before the engine started. He sulked and I was miserable, but I did not feel I had been hard, and I wouldn't say so.

It was after eleven when we arrived at my Buildings and of course he couldn't come in then. He said, "Oh, very well," and slammed the door, and we parted in much the same way as when he had brought me home before. Only I didn't smile this time; I felt more like crying. I did cry a little, as I climbed those quiet stairs.

When I had nearly reached the top, I heard someone thundering up. I knew who it was. He caught me, and we said we never would quarrel again. It would have been too awful to have met next morning at the office, without being able to

make up, properly. He begged to come in and see my parlour, but it was too late. I felt weak and tired, and as if I must finish with all the kissing and misunderstanding for the moment.

He is such a difficult person to understand.

He is like a boy, the way he gets angry and makes it up, and is so sorry he has been unkind.

I don't know what the taxi cost him.

I didn't feel sleepy, after all, when I got into my little room, only glad to lock the door, and feel I can go over everything that has happened, quietly; I want to take it all in.

Mr. Richard loves me; we are more than friends. I am his ideal as well as his friend.

I ought to feel secure.

But what would the people at the office say?

I wonder if Miss Beckles saw. Well, I shall know to-morrow if she did. Oh, if she did!

April 2nd, Friday.

Miss Beckles can't have seen. I should have felt it in her manner. She was exactly the same this morning, if anything, a little softened by the success of her bazaar.

I don't know when I've been more relieved than when she came in and smiled as usual.

I stood outside Mr. Richard's door before I could muster courage to go in. I don't know how long I should have stayed there if Mr. Grainge hadn't come by. I don't know what he thought I was standing there for. It was silly of me to be shy; Mr. Richard was exactly the same as he always is, if anything, more businesslike. As I sat there, taking down his letters, yesterday seemed a dream.

I wasn't hungry at lunch. Miss Patten rallied me and said I must be in love. I glanced at Miss Beckles, but she was looking through the door with the fixed air that always means an argument is coming, and very grateful I was when she started about the price per hour for shirt-making.

She doesn't look so bejewelled since she dropped her bangles in the collection plate at the Albert Hall.

There is the making of a nice girl in Miss Beckles, though I wish she wouldn't thump the table at us. People look round so.

I thought Mr. Richard might possibly wait till everyone was gone, so I stayed behind, foolishly. I couldn't help standing outside his door when I came down and listening. But there wasn't a sound. Of course, he had gone when the others had.

It seems so long till to-morrow. I shall be sure to see him then, as it's Saturday. When people care as we care, everything else will have to go, whatever engagements he has.

## CHAPTER VI

## "MINETTE" IS DISCOVERED

April 3rd, Saturday.

MR. RICHARD left early this morning as he is going away for the week end. He said it was an awful nuisance. Of course, he couldn't put off a week-end engagement and disturb other people's plans.

I don't know what I should have done this evening, if Jack Ford hadn't come in. We met on the stairs this afternoon, and started an argument about the Suffragettes, and he brought me a copy of their hateful paper; it is funny for a man to be on their side, but of course Jack Ford is eccentric. I saw that at once.

The way in which he spoke of them struck me as rather chivalrous, and I said so, for I do like being fair; but he said chivalry was a rotten institution, devised to keep women satisfied with injustice.

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To look at his unruffled, merry face, one could scarcely believe he could say such awful things. He never gets angry. He stood before the fire arguing away, and dismissing my contradictions as if they didn't matter at all, until I began to laugh. Sometimes I can't believe he's serious. He is plainly an idealist in some ways, and yet he said the economic question was at the root of the false relations between men and women, and that married women ought to be paid salaries by their husbands. Also that the State ought to pay women for having children. The things he talks about are extraordinary for a man to mention to a girl. And yet he is so in earnest, and cherubic. and unruffled that I find myself arguing back. I do not feel nearly so small with him as I do with Mr. Richard; Mr. Richard is so masterful; Jack Ford stands back and leaves one by oneself.

He has invited me to supper to-morrow night to finish the argument, as he had to go out to-night. A suffragette is coming, and he says I can see what the species is like. It will help to get through Sunday, though I do not believe I should ever finish arguing with Jack Ford; our ideas are too different.

April 4th, Sunday night.

Well, I have met some curious people.

They play at everything like children, as if life wasn't serious or real at all, but only as serious and real as they choose to make it. It has been like an evening in *Alice in Wonderland*.

I heard tap after tap on Jack Ford's door and people coming upstairs and then much talking and laughter, but I hadn't been invited till seven so I didn't like to go in. Though it was nervous work waiting and hearing the sounds of gathering throngs. It is the first party I've ever been to, and I did feel shy as I launched out from harbour and butted in amongst all those people.

Jack Ford appears to live by firelight. It was perfectly alarming to come into his dark room and see a cluster of people huddled round the fire on the mat, like a gathering of brigands in a cave. When I was established on the sofa, I discovered, one by one, a long-nosed young man, sitting like an effigy on a stool, very deliberate and clever, a bright-eyed bird-like boy with long dark hair, and a dark young girl with brooding eyes who nursed her knees and rested her chin on them like a young witch. There was a sort of murmur of introduc-

tion; Jack Ford said, "This is my neighbour," and they looked at me, but no one got up. The long-nosed man, whom they called Simon, asked Jack Ford if a little pot on the mantelpiece wasn't new, and Jack Ford said it was Bristol, and they all examined it enthusiastically, as if they were glad to have something to talk about. My appearance quenched the friendly shouts that had been proceeding when I knocked. I sat on the end of the sofa, thoroughly out of it, and uncomfortable.

Jack Ford then tried to bring me in by saying he had invited me to make Sarah's acquaintance, as I wasn't very sound on the woman question, and the young witch smiled faintly and said she didn't know she was a shining example.

I did feel silly.

No one took any notice of Jack Ford's remark, fortunately. Simon asked if anyone had been to Balfour Gardiner's concert, and as the Bird Boy and Jack Ford had, they began to argue hotly on the merits, or rather, demerits of various pieces that had been played there. I had never heard a single name they mentioned, although they were apparently household words, and when they plunged into a discussion about Modernity in Art,

I felt as if tons of milk cans were rattling round my head. How they shouted.

What Balfour Gardiner had done, I could not make out; the concert had been given in aid of something, but there's nothing peculiar in concerts being given in aid of things. Sarah knew all about it, too, and they yelled at one another as if they were discussing politics.

The more the Bird Boy was contradicted, the more he rubbed his hands together, and now and then, smothered his face with them, like an excited cat washing her face. As if argument was the breath of life to him. The Long-nosed Man laid down the law with a precise gesture, from the wrist. The dark girl shook back her hair; one sleek black strand had a way of falling over her forehead; Jack Ford alone continued calm and genial as if he enjoyed what everyone said or thought, and didn't mind what opinions they entertained. Though for that matter, they all were positive their own were right, except the Bird Boy, who seemed to project remarks into the conversation for the pleasure of hearing them contradicted. I would no more have dared say anything before such people than before Sir Mordaunt. Not that they expected me to say anything.

I felt worse than ever when the door flew open and an apparition in a very new, light, springy costume stood there, the girl I had met in Jack Ford's rooms before.

A delighted stir passed through the company as if someone important had come. The men got up; she nodded to the Bird Boy, patted Jack Ford on the shoulder, smiled at the Long-nosed One, and kissed the young Witch, who hugged her violently. Then she glanced in my direction. I sat as stiff as a poker; how could I have thought she would recognize me again?

But, "Hullo!" said she in a delicious lilt, as if I were a suddenly-found old friend, and then she was smiling into my eyes and holding my hand, and taking me into the heart of things.

"By-the-by, what is your name?" said this strange girl with smiling wonder in her voice and eyes; yes, wonder at discovering me again, and pleasure, and welcome, and absolute acceptance. Oh, she can make one feel in things! I did dislike telling her; Minnie is such a horrid name; but she took it and considered it and handed it back to me, a beautiful possession. "Oh, how right," said she, "when I came in, the first thing I thought was: Now what is she like, sitting there all by herself;

and now she is Minnie—of course she is Minnie—Minette! Minette; may I call you Minette?"

"Minette is good," said Simon.

The Bird Boy rubbed his hands and smothered his face, and then suddenly put his hands behind his coat-tails and stood before the fire like a father of a family. Everyone was looking at me, as if they dared to look now, and had been secretly summing me up all the time.

"Yes, do let us call you Minette," said the dark girl, "I'm Sarah."

"Now don't frighten her; you are alarming to well-brought-up people, and Minette is so well-brought-up," said the girl sitting down beside me. "Don't mind their manners, they are affectionate when kindly treated." Her eyes caught the Longnosed Man's expression, she giggled ever so little, and the Bird Boy rocked with joy.

Then, I knew they were all daring each other, as well as the world. They were exactly like happy children, showing off, and feeling they were doing it rather nicely.

I began to feel safer.

But I did want to know why she called me Minette.

"It occurred to me faintly, the first time I saw

you," said Carol, as if the answer was of great importance, and she must take care to be accurate. "I couldn't quite find the name then. But when I came in just now, and saw you perched up, away from things, and beeyutifully reserved and elegant, I knew you were a grey, strokable, elegant Minette."

Even then I didn't see, till the Bird Boy exploded with "Tabby!"

"Tortoise-shell," said Simon. "More aristo-cratic."

"Blue Persian," said Jack Ford.

"Oh no, she's not at all fluffy; she's slim and small, and a little starved, or she couldn't be Minette," cried Carol.

Then I woke up to the fact that they thought me like a strayed-in cat; just what I'd felt like.

But now they were all petting me.

They meant it nicely; but Minette is not so nice as Jasmine.

We had bread and cheese and roasted peanuts and pear-drops and acid-drops for supper. Jack Ford sat on the rug and cut the bread, Sarah toasted some, and Peter and she toasted their cheese as well. We made coffee with milk, and drank it from cups without handles, and a mug, and a tumbler. Since I had been there last, one cup had gone and two handles.

I have never enjoyed a meal so much.

After supper, when we were all very cosey and happy and at home with each other, we played a game which Carol had made up, called Travellers' Tales.

Each had to tell the story of his life in the form of a fairy story though every adventure must be true.

Simon demurred at beginning, but finally said he was on a quest. He had to win a magic slip of laurel, guarded by Swollen Giants. He described the Giants in detail, and apparently everyone recognized them, and shrieked with delight. I couldn't make much of his story, except the part where Jack Ford came in. He called him Mine Host and his rooms the Friendly Hostel.

Sarah then shook back her strand of hair, and plunged straight into an exciting tale of being a soldier in an enchanted army who possessed a Princess Leader whom they would follow to the death. Sarah had a quest, too, and sometimes it seemed as if she would serve the Princess best by following the quest, and capturing a Kingdom to lay at the Princess's feet. Sarah had come to the

Friendly Hostel on one of her excursions in search of her kingdom. She had seen him in the populace and had wondered how anyone could remain so kind in the midst of such a rotten state of things. But when she came to the Hostel, she found it was kept by a Good Fairy.

Jack Ford said, "Oh, rot," but he smiled as if he were very pleased, and the Bird Boy rubbed his hands, and Carol said: "Look at his face, isn't he indecent about himself?" At which Jack Ford said, "Appreciation was always welcome to everyone," as if he were arguing.

They are all very fond of Jack Ford.

The Bird Boy made several false starts before his story began, correcting himself, and giggling until Carol said he should lose his turn. Then he pulled himself together and became very serious and said he was a Miller's Third Son, set adrift in the world, with his patrimony, in search of a fortune.

At the present moment, his fortune was not in sight. He had been struggling in a Morass which he still thought hid buried treasure (furious No, No's from Jack Ford) anyhow, he couldn't see which way he must go, and these visits to Mine Host were his only consolation, and the danger was that he should sit for ever tippling the intoxi-

cating beverages his host so liberally provided, such as the Wine of Enthusiasm, the Cordial of Argument, and the Nectar of Justice. The Bird Boy could scarcely speak for laughing, and by the way he doubled up and rocked when they all shouted, I saw that he was only ragging. Jack Ford looked pleased all the same, and said it was awfully well-put.

Then it was Jack Ford's turn, and we all expected something very special. But after rubbing his head meditatively, he suddenly shook his head and said, "No, he had really nothing to say. Someone else, please." Everyone bewailed and commanded and persuaded, but it was no use. He said he wasn't in the mood. All he would say when everyone refused to play if he didn't, was, that the Host of a Hostel couldn't travel.

And then everyone looked at me.

"Come on, Minette," said Carol. She was presiding in the big chair, lying back in it, with her sleepy mischievous eyes fixed on me.

It was all so jolly, I wasn't afraid of them, I felt they were fellow travellers, and we had come into a hostel, and we were sitting round the fire, resting, before we took up our packs and went out again into the dangerous world. I said I had been set adrift without even a patrimony, in a strange city, but with a magic thread. By following the thread I had come to a palace, where lived the wisest and greatest King that ever existed. He ruled over the City, and was surrounded by faithful Counsellors, and Loyal Knights, and at first there did not seem a possibility of helping him. So for some time, therefore, I stayed on the steps of the palace, running errands for the humblest of the King's servants; but always keeping hold of the Magic Thread. Here, Peter asked what colour it was, and I said scarlet. I'm sure I don't know why, but it felt scarlet.

Simon nodded impatiently as if he knew.

Then one day I felt the thread tighten in my hand, and give a tiny pull, and it pulled and pulled until I stood in the presence of the King's favourite Knight. There I heard I had the wonderful fortune to fetch and carry for the King. This was difficult work for the King was surrounded by disloyal subjects and ungrateful Counsellors, but all the more, because of this, he needed someone he could trust. I should never see the King, for the Knight received the messages, but I should know all the time I was serving him. Then I found the King was ruling the whole world, not only the City,

and sometimes I was so overcome by the greatness of the task I nearly fell to the ground; but the thread always held me up. And one day the Knight said, "Well Done."

They all said, "Go on," when I stopped, as if I'd just reached the exciting part of the story. When I said it was the end, the Bird Boy said, "But what about the Knight?" and Sarah said, "Surely the Knight told the King?"

When I said "No," Sarah said, "Now, who says women have the same chance of getting on as men?" and for the moment, I thought we were going to argue. But Carol broke through the conversation, as usual. "I knew she belonged to us," said she in the ecstatic voice, as if, yes, as if she had discovered buried treasure, she had been looking for, for years. "But oh, what can she be? Now anyone can tell that Sarah is an actress, who's mad on Christabel, and whose people aren't keen on her going on the stage; and anyone can tell Peter paints and has a little money and is recovering from a bad attack of Post-Impressionism; and that Simon writes plays and has to battle with managers; and Jack is Jack our Belovèd; but what, in the name of fortune, can Minette be? For pity's sake, tell us."

"No, let's guess," said Jack Ford.

"Oh, but you know," cried the Bird Boy.

"I swear, I don't. Minette is as secretive and mysterious as Minettes always are," said Jack Ford. "I know she goes out all day but I haven't the least idea where. No one ever comes to see her, she never moves about her room, she retreats into silence and goes out into mystery. I should like to have the mystery cleared up, but I think we ought to guess, and she needn't tell us unless somebody guesses right."

I couldn't believe my ears. Jack Ford isn't the sort of person you can imagine wondering about anything. But I longed to hear their guesses; it was only fair to tell them about myself, now Carol had told me about the others.

Simon said he knew and refused to guess.

The Bird Boy rubbed his face several times, and then advanced the theory that I was an attendant in a Lunatic Asylum.

Sarah stared into the fire under her beetling brows as if she were dragging out the secret from the glowing coals, and finally said I looked like the sort of person who worked for Missions. Was it anything to do with a Settlement?

Jack Ford had a fancy I went to an Art School.

I couldn't help saying "Why?" and he said my room had an artistic look. I suppose that's the Burne-Jones Autotypes father was so keen on.

But Carol only looked puzzled.

"The only thing that occurs to me, it couldn't be," said she. "You couldn't be in Selfridge's, could you, Minette?"

Everyone pealed with laughter and Carol's eyes glinted in a subtle way. I was so glad I wasn't at Selfridge's. It was glorious to be able to be proud of the real thing. Their stories dressed up their real lives, but my real life was far more splendid than the story.

"I'm in an office," said I. "The head of it really does rule the world indirectly, at least, the most important part of it."

Simon nodded his head in his tired omniscient manner, Jack Ford pulled at his pipe and stared at me rather more gravely than usual, Sarah and the Bird Boy expressed surprise loudly, but Carol looked at me, a little like Jack Ford. As if I had let out something.

My cheeks began to burn. Suddenly I remembered what I had said about the Knight.

But it turned out she wasn't thinking of that. "Minette, you are an idealist," said Carol, as

if she were making a deep charge against me, pitifully.

"It may sound like idealizing, but I haven't given an idea of the splendidness of it all," said I. "They really are Kings and Knights, though they might seem City Men to you."

"What was the thread?" asked the Bird Boy getting up onto his knees, and I explained it was work or duty; duty would be the best way of putting it, because duty was the thread that bound the whole concern together, and the King held the end of the thread.

The Bird Boy rubbed his face in a non-committal manner when I said this. Simon looked more graven-imagey than ever. Sarah asked if there was any more coffee, and everyone welcomed the suggestion.

Carol had a new way of making it, and they gathered round the pot and somehow I was in the cold again. I couldn't help feeling they had found something funny in my story which they didn't altogether like. Presently Carol glanced round, and saw I was alone, and soon she left the coffee operations and settled into place beside me with a comforting smile.

"We liked your story, Minette," said she, "but

we were rather awed by anyone being able to see a City office like that."

Her face glowed with gentleness and sweetness; she looked up at me almost timidly. She has a way of interlacing her fingers on which the great diamond ring shines so oddly, and resting her soft little chin on them, so that there may be a support for the important thoughts she's thinking! She has such a babyish mouth, and absurdly straight nose, and white, white hands, that it is ridiculous for her to be serious. Her eyes generally look as dewy and melting as ripe soft blackberries. Only there's the hint of a snap in them, a deep-down gleam; I don't think one could ever be sure she was not making fun, or would not see the funny side the next minute.

The cloth of her suit was as soft and fine as velvet, the touch of lace at her throat was real, she had silk stockings and suede shoes to match her dress, and her skirt was cut up the centre this time; it was difficult not to be shocked sometimes. Except that she is so pretty and so emphatically a law to herself.

"What office are you in?" said she in a purring way. "I want to know about you, Minette."

There seemed no reason why I should not tell

her and explain something of what we were doing. Her eyes never left mine. Then she said, "And how do you serve the King? What do you do, exactly?" I told her I took someone's letters who was very near the head.

"And the Someone said 'Well done,' " said the girl, still studying me. I could not help growing red. Her eyes were searching so.

"And you are very happy, but a little afraid," she continued; "don't take any men too seriously. Always say to yourself, I am an idealist, even about The Alliance."

I wished I had not told her, as she spoke.

But she patted my hand, as if to say it was all right. I believe she sees exactly what is passing in everybody's mind.

"I should like to have heard more about this wonderful King, but perhaps it would not be fair. I am Carol Grainge."

I had been talking all the time to Mr. Grainge's daughter. What a mercy I had spoken of him the way I had. There can't have been any harm in speaking of him like that.

Naturally, she thinks I idealize things, for she is the sort of woman who looks on the City as a

dull place where the money she spends comes from. One can see she has no conception of work or duty.

At this moment, Sarah remembered that Carol had never told her story, but she said the game was over, and the Idle Rich never had stories. From the way she said it, I felt she was answering my opinion of her; her eyes were hidden as if they were full of laughter.

When we got up to go, she stood before Jack Ford with her eyes cast down, and I saw him looking at her very hard, with a frown, as if he knew there was something hidden in her eyes, and was a little uneasy. I was waiting to say good-bye, and I have still the picture of those two, him so straightforward and cheery and Carol expensive—and elusive.

What a wonderfully interesting place the world would be if everyone was friendly with each other. I suppose classes were invented, so that everyone could feel superior to somebody. I loathe Aunt Minnie and Uncle Samuel because I feel superior. Also Miss Beckles and Miss Patten. I enjoy feeling superior to them. But to-night, one didn't think about that sort of thing. Sarah was shabbier than me, but she flew at Carol and kissed her.

Simon and the Bird Boy are better dressed than Jack Ford but no one thinks about anyone's clothes with them.

They have made a charmed company where their own standards reign. The only thing is, that I certainly felt superior when Carol let me in and they became nice to me, because I knew they would have shuddered at Miss Patten and Miss Beckles. Except Jack Ford. I can't imagine him shuddering at anyone. That is the big difference between him and Mr. Richard.

#### CHAPTER VII

### JACK FORD'S TEA-PARTY

April 6th, Tuesday.

WE are resolutely behaving as if we were nothing to each other. The office stands as an ideal to both of us, and we can conquer ourselves for its sake. It is rather fine to have to fight against ourselves together; for of course we both know what we each are feeling. We see it in each other's eyes; we hear it in each other's voice; it doesn't matter what Mr. Richard says, it is enough to hear him speak; he looks at me as little as possible, but I know why.

I was right in thinking Mr. Richard like a soldier. It was a shock the first day, and the next, and next, to be treated as usual, but I can rise to his courage. We are testing ourselves. When we have proved to ourselves that our feelings can be mastered, when we know that office hours find us at our posts, unflinchingly, then we can trust

ourselves to see as much as we like of each other, outside. Mr. Richard is right to be sternly businesslike. I love him for it. I should not love him if I did not worship him for the true-as-steel Englishman that he is.

And Saturday will soon be here. The week end is our own.

# April 7th, Wednesday.

I have seen Miss Beckles in a new light to-day. There is something noble about her. She asked if she might lunch with us on Monday, as the Suffragettes are having a Self-Denial week. Miss Beckles always spends a shilling on her lunch and goes to a horrid eating-house where there is a cheap "Ordinary." A good dinner is so important to her that a roll and cup of cocoa is self-denial indeed. I had never talked properly to her before. Of course we argued the whole time; Miss Beckles has picked up so many facts at the countless meetings she attends that it is like arguing with a specialist and not fair. She has not impressed me, however, until to-day. The Teashop is always crowded and the waitresses are nearly run off their feet; to-day, our waitress spilt Miss Beckles's cup of cocoa as she put it down, and half slopped over. The girl looked in a bad temper, and of course the fault was hers. She herself expected to be sent back for more. But to my amazement, Miss Beckles said it didn't matter, and did not even ask for her soaked roll to be exchanged. It was not because she was not hungry; it is painful to see her eat up every crumb. We both told her she could demand a fresh portion, but she shook her head and said the waitress would have to pay, and when girls are as under paid and hard worked as that, you can't expect perfection. The least we under-dogs could do, was to stick by one another. When the girl made out our bill, I heard her tell Miss Beckles she was sorry about the cocoa, and Miss Beckles said, "Fourteen hours, eh?" and the girl said, "Yes, and fines," and Miss Beckles nodded as if she knew all about it. It gave me an eerie feeling as if they belonged to a secret society.

When we came away, Miss Beckles told us of the terrible state of things behind the scenes. One can see the girls look ill and cross and worried, but I never guessed they worked for eight and nine shillings a week, with fines.

Grown-up women being fined!

As if people could expect anyone to work without mistakes sometimes.

April 8th, Thursday.

Sir Mordaunt is back; he walked into the office to-day, his first visit since Mr. Richard came.

Sir Mordaunt was in Mr. Grainge's room when I went in to Mr. Richard; Mr. Richard looked so worried I could not help giving him a little glance. But he did not take any notice. It is dreadful not to be able to speak to him and comfort him and help him.

Oh, how I long for the week end to come.

Just before I went, Sir Mordaunt came out and spoke to Mr. Richard while I sat like a dummy. It was strange to be taken no notice of, when I mean so much to Mr. Richard. I shall have to overcome my fear of people like him and Mr. Grainge, for some day I shall know them as Mr. Richard does. In my heart, I know they will not expect me to go on working at the office. Mr. Richard has chosen me to share his home, and I shall have to help his work indirectly. It will be a wrench to leave the office. But women in Mr. Richard's class don't work with men; the men work

for them. How strange it will be to be worked for by Mr. Richard, almost impossibly presumptuous. I shall always feel it is my place to work for him.

Oh how much we have to say to each other! He will surely speak to-morrow.

# April 9th, Friday.

He hasn't said anything to-day. I felt like a soldier under fire when I got up, directly he had finished, and marched straight out of the room. But he is my superior officer. I must wait till he gives the signal. After all, the week is not ended, the business week. There's no point in speaking till to-morrow morning.

My sky parlour is swept and garnished ready. If he wants to come to-morrow, I shan't have to put him off.

Oh my love, my love, our week end is so near.

# April 10th, Saturday.

We haven't arranged anything; we've been kept from speaking to each other. I knew it was a mistake to leave it so late.

Oh I can't believe our chance of speaking to each other has gone. This morning has been like a nightmare.

It was stupid of him not to arrange at once, directly I came in, while we had the chance. We have a perfect right to make an appointment to meet each other outside the office, in our free time. I couldn't believe it when he looked down on his desk, at the end of the letters. I couldn't help lingering. What an idiot I was not to speak. But it was so difficult when Mr. Richard was pretending to write; it wasn't fair of him; he knew I was waiting. Oh, if I only had had the courage to speak out, instead of arranging my pen, and looking through my notebook. I felt if I waited, Mr. Richard would have to say something.

The silence was awful.

Just when one of us would have had to say something, Mr. Benson came in, and I had to go.

It seemed as if the morning would never, never end.

I could have screamed when Miss Beckles and Miss Patten started bickering at one o'clock, instead of clearing out as they always do. I stayed there, cleaning my typewriter. To-day of all days Miss Patten was meeting someone to go to a matinée, and Miss Beckles was endeavouring to persuade her to come to Peckham or Clapham or somewhere instead.

Then the door opened, and Mr. Richard looked in.

How could he say anything before them? But he might have had the sense to tell me he wanted me downstairs, instead of colouring and drawing back.

I couldn't jump up and run after him.

It was splendidly brave of him to have come like that; the girls always go at one. I've never known them stay before.

I knew they would suspect if I stayed indefinitely, so I waited another five minutes, then shut up my typewriter and went out in a composed way. Then I bolted downstairs to Mr. Richard's room; he had come to me, it was only fair I should go to him.

No one was there.

I stood like a dummy in the emptiness.

I have never felt the City so large as I did when I came out of the office. There was no hope of finding him. The office had tossed us all into space and closed up, and for two whole days we are left to gyrate alone in darkness. Oh, how long it seems till Monday. I can't bear it. I can't bear it.

Jack Ford has just been in. His piano has come and he is having a party. If I go there, I shall get through the afternoon. I cannot sit here waiting, waiting.

### Evening.

I am glad to have something else to think about.

I mustn't give in. I must battle with the pain.

I do feel better.

Jack Ford fetched me to help him move the piano: it was such a comfort to have something to push at. I noticed his books for the first time stowed away on shelves beneath the beams. He volunteered the information that he wrote. He calls it scribbling, and says he's going to have a book out soon.

He had lots of cakes for tea, and is evidently comfortably off. He asked me to cut the bread and butter while he saw to the kettle. So he sat on the rug and gave himself up to arguing. He often reminds me of father. I suppose it's natural for people who write to think talking is the principal aim of life.

I told him one of the girls at the Alliance was a Suffragette; but I wasn't converted by any means. Still I had seen women could stick together, which I had never thought possible.

Jack Ford answered that most business women were thinking the only true friends a woman could have were men, and this was an inevitable reaction from the fear of everything in trousess but just as much oversexed.

The words he uses make one go rather hot sometimes; one wishes he respected women a little more; I do like men to be chivalrous. For all his daringness, Mr. Richard always remembers one is a woman and certain subjects would always be sacred to him. But Jack Ford says everything straight out, without the least consideration. I suppose it is a question of refinement and manliness. Manly men are always reverent to women.

I was not surprised to hear Sarah is a Militant; she looks a Joan-of-Arc-y person. It doesn't spoil her, somehow. That dark fateful look suggests the French Revolution and Nihilism and all that sort of thing; some women can be rebels picturesquely, and, I was not surprised to hear that Carol was not a Suffragette! she is far too feminine. She might be audacious but she would never be unsexed. I can't imagine her being desperately in earnest, either.

Jack Ford summed her up as "disliking discomfort," but I said that wasn't the reason why

we objected to all this shrieking and scratching; we were defending something that couldn't be put into words, and however a few abnormal women might clamour, women as a whole would never give up their instinct about woman's dignity.

He asked if I seriously considered women were treated in a dignified way to-day, and I said, "By true men, yes." He asked if I thought their wages were decided by true men, and I had to say No. But true men give women everything and work for them. Jack Ford said as the percentage of true men was decreasing yearly, ought not women to be protected from the men who were frankly out to sweat them? Practically, the entire commercial world!

I could see there was something in this point of view, but I don't see that having votes will affect the matter, and the cases Jack Ford cited of the Agricultural Labourers and Trades Unionists do not convince me. All classes of women have the same interest in their womanhood, and it seems to me that this is at stake. If we were on an equal footing with men, why should they give us anything? Where will the old ideals of chivalry come in? Where will be the refining influence women

have always had on men, their strength made perfect in our weakness?

It is for the men's sake we are battling, as well as our own.

Jack Ford said I was quoting from the Militants now, and that I had said battling was unwomanly. But he knew I meant gentle though unflinching resistance to these hardening new ideas. I do believe in men and women working together, but men must always remember they are men, and we must always remember we are women, and we always do.

Jack Ford is shut up in a room all day; men like him and father aren't as manly as the men who have to carve their way out in the jostle of the world.

I asked him if he honestly felt Carol would be improved if she lost her femininity; he said the male in him wanted her to stay that way, but he knew that feeling was the devil. Carol was the product of a diseased civilization; all people who lived on capital or other people's earnings were parasites, and parasites were morally incapable of facing issues.

He said it didn't matter what people contributed to the service of the world: they must do something. I said Carol contributed charm, and was of far more value and refreshment than a picture. And again Jack Ford said the male in him quite agreed with me, but logically he knew that such charm was the bottomless pit from which nothing hale or wholesome grew.

Somehow I didn't like it when he talked about the "male in him"; there was something horrid and coarse and brutal in the way he said it. There are some things we ought not to speak about, or think of, even to ourselves.

I am sure Mr. Richard never thinks such things; gentlemen don't. But Jack Ford is the sort of man who ought to be friends with women, because he can be, and I don't like the way he speaks of Carol. It is weak of him to be attracted by her against his will, and I hate weakness. But although I never know what he is going to say, and sometimes the conversation is very uncomfortable, being with him is absorbingly interesting.

I was sorry when the Bird Boy and a new friend appeared, called Stephen; he has a cold face, with very distinct features, a shock of pale red hair, and a proud, sneering look. He speaks in a refined voice, and evidently feels his words are precious.

He patted Jack Ford's shoulder in a superior

way and bowed superficially to me. The Bird Boy wrung me by the hand like an old friend, and stood on the rug with his hands behind his coat-tails, looking first on one side, then on the other, and suddenly smothered his face with one hand for a moment as if he were awfully happy to be there.

They both viewed the piano with interest and Stephen asked if he might try it.

One knew instinctively he would do everything very well. His fingers struck each note clearly and precisely, never missing nor slurring one of the many rippling notes and making the tune in the bass sound out like an organ.

Then he twisted off the chair like a child getting up and said the piano was quite good.

The Bird Boy was then asked to try it and ambled towards it, rather shyly.

When he touched the keys they sounded like velvet.

I like being with men. They are such workers. When tea was made the three of them plunged into discussion about pictures. Stephen is an artist, too. It was a revelation to see the importance they attached to whether pictures were right or wrong. The great thing that matters is to be sincere and in the movement. From the way they

spoke, they are evidently all in the very front of the movement and are having a very hard time in consequence. But they say the old ideals are crashing and ripping in every direction. I can see they feel just as great as Mr. Grainge and Mr. Richard do. The Imperial Alliance is making the nation powerful and the men who are in it are Empire Builders; and this Artists' Alliance that the Bird Boy and Stephen belong to is going to revolutionize Art, extinguish the Academy, and every other exhibition of to-day except their own, and be the cosmic expression of Superman.

As Miss Patten would say, "dear, dear."

All the same, it's inspiriting to be with people who believe so earnestly in what they're doing, and their power to do it, and can keep jolly as well.

We had finished tea when Sarah came in; I was more struck than ever by her brooding air. Her smile was scarcely enough to come to the surface; her expression changed the least little bit, to show that she remembered me, and that was all. I heard Jack Ford murmur something, and she said "Hunger strike."

Stephen asked if she had seen "the Holmes," which turns out to be the name of an artist; they

always speak of pictures as "the Johns" "the Orpens," as if they were the painter's offspring; it's so bewildering, especially when one has never heard of the artist's name.

Sarah answers as if she knows what they are talking about, but is just keeping time, and is soon going to let go her hold on all this sort of thing, and it has ceased to be important. There is a wonderful calm about her, as if her soul is dead to the things of this world, and only her lips move from habit and she sees us all as moving pictures with which she has no relation. It is depressing. How can one be interested in life if the person you are talking to, feels it does not matter. Jack Ford makes one feel splendidly alive; Stephen makes one feel the only reason for life is to do things well; but people who have let go of every interest but the One Purpose make me feel they are in a nightmare, and I want to scream and wake them up.

Sarah looked as if the fate of the universe depended on what she was going to do and the shadow from her, spread into the room, till we were all keeping time like people in a dream.

Suddenly the Bird Boy groaned out loud, I am sure, unconsciously; and Jack Ford jumped up and

asked someone to play for him. We had all forgotten the piano.

He sings magnificently; I couldn't believe my ears when the glorious notes came, deep and mellow, and then with an eerie high note of piercing sweetness, like a boy's.

He sang a slow thing, "When I am Laid in Earth," which suited the atmosphere, somehow; and I stared at Sarah sitting with her chin on her hands, gazing, gazing into the coals, unshakably; and it was like looking at someone who had been condemned and whom nothing could save. There was endurance in her face, but no peace; a grate of ashes is not peaceful.

Jack Ford sang several songs; everyone was wistful and yearning, and about loving in vain, or loving and losing, or the memory of love. He has very deep feelings.

The shadows melted into darkness, and the room grew still; it was a wonderful hour.

Suddenly Stephen asked Jack Ford to sing something decent. All this slosh was getting on his nerves. Sarah said, "What a shame! Poor Bleeding Heart!" That turns out to be Jack Ford's nickname!

He is good-humoured; he laughed.

What do these people take seriously? Never their feelings.

Even Sarah laughed at his yearning.

I can't make them out.

Well, well, the afternoon has gone. That's one comfort.

Gone, gone, the afternoon has gone, and all the time he has been waiting.

"DEAREST,

"I think we deserve a holiday, don't you? Hyde Park Corner, please, and come in a chariot and wait if I'm not there; four sharp. I shan't be more than a few minutes late, if that. Then—I'll tell you all about it. Oh Jasmine, our wood—to-night.—R."

The fool of a boy had pushed it under the door, and it had stuck in the carpet. It was a miracle I saw it sticking out. Fool, fool, he must have heard us next door; why didn't he knock there?

It is ten o'clock, I can't do anything to-night.

What will he think? Oh, if he's been waiting!

And I might have been with him now—

now——

Sunday.

We are in London together and we might as well be at the opposite ends of the world.

I have been waiting for him to come all day; he must know I was prevented by an accident; he must want to know why I didn't come.

He can't be angry, before he has heard my reason.

He knows he can come to me. I can't go to him.

I have tried to telephone, but the first time he wasn't down, and the second time Sir Mordaunt answered. I dropped the receiver as if it were redhot; fortunately I hadn't spoken. If he had heard my voice!

I can't get to him.

I hadn't realized before how far away I am. What will his people say? What will Sir Mordaunt say?

I daren't think of it.

I feel as if his people stand round him, and guard him; they are driving me from the door. And he is locked up in a thousand interests, surrounded by a thousand friends; and I am a feeble, cheap little clerk trying to get in where I don't

belong. It is only three o'clock now. Eighteen hours before I see him.

Someone knocked. Jack Ford, to ask if I felt like a walk; I didn't even make the excuse of a headache. I just said "No," and shut the door. Seventeen hours still.

He may come yet. He mayn't have been able to get off before.

## CHAPTER VIII

#### MR. RICHARD MAKES FRIENDS

April 12th, Monday night.

THE nightmare is over. I am forgiven.

I am glad it happened just the way it did,
for through the misery we have found out how
much we mean to one another.

Oh what a comfort it is that I have this little room where we can see each other.

When I got to the office, I found the work had been rearranged; Mr. Benson is to work with Mr. Richard, Miss Patten is to take their letters, and I am to work for Mr. Grainge. How strange it is that once I should have been wild with joy at this, and now—

I didn't see Mr. Richard all the morning.

In the lunch hour I wrote to him, typed his name, marked it "personal," and sent it, express.

I didn't see him all the afternoon.

But I knew we could never explain at the office; it would have been no use if I had seen him there.

I tried to put him out of my head; I decided I would go on with the day's work exactly as if there were no chance of ever seeing him again. I stopped at Mr. Jones's on my way up and bought some fruit. I joined in the conversation he was having with a working-woman; we discussed the terrible doings of the Suffragettes; I pointed out to Mr. Jones that no true woman ever demanded anything, even justice; I heard of the woman's wretched wages and Mr. Jones's sympathy, and their championship of burning houses and pillaging post-offices, and liked them for their tolerance though I didn't agree; and then I went up to my room, and tried to eat my supper.

When he knocked, I had honestly given up expecting him.

Oh, I was happy. I was beginning to think he had repented. But he was here with me; he had come; it was so lovely to see him look round my little room, rather shyly, at first, until he saw my Line upon the mantelshelf, and laughed.

"Dear me," said he, "you are a millingtary small person. I'm going to be very jealous."

He sat in my armchair, where I have so often

pictured him, and I sat on the tin box where I could look at him; it was glorious to see him pulling at his pipe as if he were at home. He was amused at my admiration for fighting-men, and said he was thinking of joining the Territorials; and should have to come and see me in his uniform. He said it was ripping of me to feel as I did about duty; he had been fighting with himself like the devil all the week, but the sight of my little pale face on Saturday finished him. Then, when he couldn't get at me, and when I didn't turn up, and he was left to kick his heels, not knowing what to do, he had decided he must chuck the whole thing. \*He simply could not stand it. When Grainge suggested the new arrangement he felt it was a clear get-out. But then my letter came, and it was so sweet and so dashed plucky, that he said to himself, "Well, here's a girl in a million, who knows what she's about, and won't stand any nonsense. She cares for you; she knows you care for her; the mischief's done; you're a sensitive idiot." I said whatever happened, we must not be sensitive, but speak the truth straight out to each other. I couldn't stand silence and misunderstanding. If we cared for each other, we must trust each other, and be able to get at

each other, and never, never feel we were separated by anything.

He asked if I quite understood what I was saying, and I said yes, I knew, in the end, it would mean me leaving the Alliance. But he was worth it.

He looked into the fire without speaking, as if he knew what this would mean to me.

I went on and told him I was ready to face what Sir Mordaunt and Mr. Grainge would feel about the matter, and his people. But we must shut them out. He nodded. But he said if we were sensible, there needn't be a row. I said, of course, but one must face the risk.

Then he said he hated facing things, and it was ripping of me to look at the position squarely, only it made him feel a cad. He didn't feel he was worthy of me.

I said I didn't feel worthy of him, so we were quits.

And then he said we were taking the whole thing a bit seriously, weren't we, and we might get frightfully tired of each other, and there was no sense in being serious till we'd got something to be serious about. Would I kindly smile, instanter?

Then he asked how I'd got on with Mr. Grainge,

and I told him I'd scarcely taken in a word of anything he'd said to me, and Mr. Richard was awfully pleased, for when he'd heard I was going to work for Grainge, he had been frightfully jealous. I told him I should enjoy it now; it was only being shut off from him that had made me lose interest in everything. I asked if he had missed me, and he said, "Confoundedly."

He said he didn't know how he had kept up not speaking to me all the week; he couldn't have done it if I hadn't been so flintlike. But when he saw me sitting there like a composed little saint, it was up to him to show me two could play at that game. When I caved in, he was beaten.

Then he said he hadn't been forgiven yet.

I said I had forgiven everything I could forgive him for, but he sat looking at me, and I came to him. I want nothing more than to obey him.

We don't have to talk to one another.

But surely, surely, he knows I belong to him?

Just as I felt perfectly, perfectly happy, Jack Ford's piano started; it was lovely sitting there in the candle-light, listening; but instead of enjoying it, Mr. Richard sat up, roughly. I was so surprised I didn't understand. Even when he said, "What's that?" I didn't understand.

I went back to the tin box because he didn't seem to want me any longer. I wasn't flurried at anything but Mr. Richard's manner. He does misunderstand so.

One can't help being friends with the person one lives next door to. When he said no decent man would ask a girl to his rooms, my heart stopped beating. It was such a wicked thing to attack Jack Ford. I defended our right to be friends. It doesn't matter that we are only acquaintances; after his kindnesses, I couldn't let anyone accuse and suspect him.

Mr. Richard said a man who sang like that, couldn't be friends with a woman. I told him how we all laughed at him and called him Bleeding Heart, and that Jack Ford laughed too. I told him about Sarah and what a friend she was, and Mr. Richard said that Suffragettes had no morals. Then I had to defend Sarah.

I told him that Jack Ford and his friends were like children, in the way they treated one another, and Mr. Richard said I had evidently got into a rotten Bohemian set, and for my own sake, I must pull up. I had been so taken up with defending them, that I had not told him the final proof that they weren't that sort of set at all. It was glorious

to be able to tell him I had made friends with Carol Grainge and she went to Jack Ford's rooms alone as much as I did.

For a moment, I could not make out what was happening. Mr. Richard went white, or rather, grey. He was surprised.

"Carol? You know Miss Grainge?" said he.

"She calls me Minette," said I. "They all do; they think me like a strayed-in kitten." They really thought me like a cat, but I wanted Mr. Richard to think they saw me nicely.

But "kitten" gave a wrong impression.

Mr. Richard got up and leaned against the mantelpiece, looking down on me in an angry, not very nice way.

"So you're their kitten, are you?" said he. "Well, I'm always going wrong about women. I took Carol Grainge to be a well-bred girl. And I took you for a little nun. I'm beginning to find out women are all alike, and it's a painful lesson."

"I can't see that there is any more harm in Carol Grainge going to see Jack Ford than you coming to see me," said I. "If people could look inside our rooms, they would say there was more harm in you coming here; I am absolutely certain Jack Ford doesn't—doesn't—kiss Carol Grainge." It was hard even to say it; like insulting them.

"How do you know?" said Mr. Richard with a laugh.

"Because Jack Ford isn't that sort," said I.
"He's the sort of man who is truly friends with women."

"And I'm not, eh?" said Mr. Richard, looking as if he could murder someone.

"You're the sort of man that cares for people, and that people care for," said I, and began to cry like a silly.

Mr. Richard knelt down, then, and said he was a brute, and we made it up.

But he wasn't quite happy, and I wasn't, either; for in my heart I know he would hate the way in which Jack Ford speaks of certain things and would think it wrong for me to hear such words; and Carol and Jack Ford are not exactly friends. Yet Mr. Richard could not understand the good side of them, if I told the truth.

Mr. Richard began again presently, saying he was not completely sure of me. If I really loved him, I would give him my word not to go to Jack Ford's rooms or let him come to mine. I asked him if he would think me reasonable if I asked him

not to see any of his friends, but he said my case was different. I was a girl, and as I hadn't the sense to protect myself, he should have to do it for me. It was his place to protect me now. I must think of my reputation. What would Jack Ford's friends think if they found me there.

I couldn't help laughing; it was so silly. When I thought of Jack Ford, Sarah, and the Bird Boy being shocked, I realized what much kinder people they were, than those Mr. Richard had been used to. But I knew it would be unwise to try and explain to Mr. Richard, how nice they were and how a girl could go to the end of the world with Jack Ford or his friends. The way that Mr. Richard had talked about Jack Ford showed Mr. Richard doesn't understand what a man can be. But if I'd told him that, he would, of course, only have been more jealous.

So I said it was a question of my independence, and he said that was the trouble. But I stuck to it, that I would not cut myself off from the only friends I had, and pointed out how nice it was for me to be beginning to know his friends, and that being friends with Carol Grainge made me feel so much nearer him, socially. I told him how awful I had felt when I had telephoned to his house. He

was annoyed to hear I had done such a thing. He made me promise I would never write or telephone to him at his home again. His father was like a lynx.

I was ready to promise that. As long as he is living in his father's house, his father has to be thought about. Just as we have to respect authority at the office.

He kissed me again at this, and said I made him feel a worm. I can't understand why thinking me good should make him repent loving me. Surely he ought to be glad when he sees I want to do right? How could he care for me if I didn't try my best to be straight? I love him because he is my ideal of what a man should be, and when he talks of the great things he is going to do, and how the office must come before everything, and a man must put his country before personal interests, I thrill with pride in him, and am proud I love a man like that.

But when he admires me for doing right, it seems to make him wretched.

When I asked him, he only smoothed my eyebrows and said I mustn't frown.

"Don't let's worry about anything," said he.
"Birds in their little nests agree. This shall be

our little nest. A man wants a girl to rest him, not to worry him with silly questions. You could be a most restful little person if you gave your mind to it."

I asked if he thought being in business, made me unrestful?

He said it did, and it didn't. Sometimes he liked to talk business when he was in the mood. Sometimes of course he wanted to get away from it. But I was the sort of girl who could leave all that sort of thing behind, and think of daffodils and green things. He thought my eyes had a bit of green in them, when I was cheeky. He likes me to be cheeky.

I don't feel I'll ever be cheeky with Mr. Richard. But he says when I put the office before him, it's awful cheek although he likes me for it. We are never going to misunderstand one another again. He is going to come here to see me twice a week and take me out, when possible, on Saturdays. Sometimes he has to go to places with his people. I asked if he saw much of Carol Grainge, but he said he didn't. He dined there sometimes, but his mother can't stand Mrs. Grainge, and he had rather dumped Carol with her mother. They had both struck him as overdressed, the sort of women

you meet at the Savoy. Of course Mr. Grainge was a Colossus and goes everywhere.

But he said it was a big surprise to know Carol came to a man's rooms in a place like this, though he knew she went her own way pretty systematically. He was certain her people didn't know. Mrs. Grainge was a climber and all that, and her business was to marry Carol. She expected Carol to make a big match, and it was getting time she did. This was her fourth season. Carol had had the cheek to patronize him; when he is next there he will make a point of talking about Battersea and see if she finds that an interesting subject. His eyes twinkled as if he were interested in Carol.

I wished I hadn't told him. In a way, I felt I had betrayed her. And Mr. Richard does not understand.

Carol may be fashionable and patronizing when she is at home but there's an adventurous side to her, and she comes to Jack Ford's rooms and knows his friends to satisfy the free, child spirit in her. She looks as if she has escaped and is among her own kind.

Although in some ways Mr. Richard is boyish, he doesn't understand how one can get outside the grown-up suspicions and customs of ordinary life, and yet remain nice. He classes everyone who doesn't attach importance to his and his people's standards as immoral. I know Mr. Richard's standards are splendid, and are the standards of the very best sort of people, really well-bred people; but Jack Ford and his friends are not immoral though they sit on the floor, boil their own coffee, call each other by Christian names or nicknames, directly or before they have been introduced, and visit each other just the same whether they are girls or men. They may be Bohemian, but they are not fast. There wasn't a suspicion of flirting at Jack Ford's party, and the only person in the set who would be likely to flirt is Mr. Richard's friend, Carol Grainge.

I admire Mr. Richard just because he is so certain he is right and sees everything in such an unflinching and straightforward way, and yet I admire Jack Ford and his friends too. It is so jolly to be friendly like children. They think about some things seriously too, although they are so quick to laugh. Jack Ford is perfectly serious about justice being done to women, and Sarah has devoted her life to the cause, and looks as if she would march without hesitation to the stake;

and Simon and the Bird Boy appear to be struggling along in their work, with great pluck. Their work is important to them all. And they didn't make me feel hard or poor or any of the things Mr. Richard makes me feel, but as if I belonged to them and we were all one family.

But I have found out that Mr. Richard has been brought up to see everything from his own ring-fence. He knows the very nicest people think that way, and so he is absolutely certain he is right. He is essentially well-bred. And of course everyone outside his own class (except, I suppose, the people above it) seem to him ill-bred. I tremble to think of him finding out about Aunt Minnie and Uncle Samuel.

When I think of Sir Mordaunt Mordaunt's piercing eyes and sneer, my heart fails. And if they don't consider Carol one of their set, how will they accept me? What will Lady Mordaunt say when Mr. Richard tells her he is going to marry one of Mr. Grainge's clerks. He must have enormous courage to have loved me, and told me so. I must be worthy of him.

I expect when he asked me to give up knowing Carol and Jack Ford, he was thinking of his people and the future. They would probably hate him to marry a friend of Carol's. If I haven't any friends it will be easier for them.

I must put Mr. Richard before everything and everyone. What isn't he giving up for me? What isn't he facing for my sake? He dreads his father almost as much as I do, but he will have to bear the brunt of it and fight the battle. He is brave.

He came back to kiss me after he had started downstairs, and we stood on the little landing and he told me he should picture me asleep way up there, in our little nest. It was as if he couldn't go. I was so afraid Jack Ford would hear. But by good luck his door creaked, and Mr. Richard had started down before Jack Ford looked out. He caught me hanging over the bannister.

"I thought I heard someone," said he.

"It's only I," said I.

"Sorry. I was half expecting someone," said Jack Ford and closed his door. I don't know what he thought I was doing out there. It is a comfort he is Jack Ford, and not an ordinary person who would be curious.

## CHAPTER IX

### A VISIT FROM CAROL

April 16th, Saturday.

I DIDN'T think it possible our plans could gang agley; but they have. The insecurity is worse than it has ever been. I know he did it because he was angry, which is a little comfort, but she is so attractive, and I have no shadow of a chance against her. Well, suppose I haven't.

What would you do, you men who have won through? Would you sit and mew if a better man than you came along? What would you do, if you didn't get what you'd set your heart on? Would you spend the rest of your life being sorry for yourselves?

I know what you'd do, what you have done, I bet, over and over again for no one's plans go just as one would have them. I can see in your faces, you have set your teeth, and done the best you

could just where you were. Being sorry for oneself is no use.

Carol has taken Mr. Richard and I am not going to mew. I am going to feel as if it did not concern me. I am going to stand back, if I am to stand back, with a good grace. I am not going to think of what she has and I haven't. I am going to think of the things I have, and leave what she has, to her.

I have had a wonderful afternoon. I have heard people talking of real things. Instead of being alone, wonderful people have been round me. I am going to remember all the interesting things that have happened. It is as if I am being devoured and tortured and I want to cry and cry and beat the wall; but I'm not going to. I am going to set my teeth and put my back to the wall.

Because Carol went off with Mr. Richard, she isn't less interesting. Our talk remains. When I first saw her, how could I ever have guessed she would have come to tea with me? I should have been beside myself with flattered vanity. She came from a kind motive; she has been nice to me all through. How petty, how contemptible it would be to be jealous. Can't I be big enough to admire her!

Loving Mr. Richard is nothing to be ashamed of; I must not be afraid of people knowing that he comes here. Being afraid is as bad as mewing.

Naturally I am disappointed that we did not have tea together, and go off for our tramp at Kew. We never seem to be able to do the same thing twice, by-the-by. One might almost become superstitious about it.

Still, it was jolly of them all to troop in to see me, as if I were a truly friend. Of course, if I hadn't looked out—

There, there! Mewing again!

I did look out; I thought it was a parcel, but it was Carol. Directly I saw her, my heart sank, leagues. I knew Jack Ford was out and if she suggested waiting, she would have to come. She did. She had on a white frock, oh, so skimpy, there seemed scarcely any frock, and she crooked one knee and tilted her head back and stood looking round like something so exquisitely new and young, she ought to have been packed in tissue paper. There was a delicate pink colour on her cheeks, and her lips had more colour to-day as if she had been tinted to suit the white frock. Her strange, dead-white hat gave her an Oriental look. She might have been a little Persian Princess;

there was languor in her heavy eyelids and faintly smiling mouth, she never had to hurry or do anything she didn't want to do. She looked a treasure.

Now then; I am starting to mew.

She looked ravishingly pretty.

She was not thinking of the contrast between us; she saw my room in the nice way in which she has seen me at Jack Ford's party, and she enjoyed it as she enjoys being at Jack Ford's. I could see this by the way she opened her eyes and smiled as if she were happy at last.

"Oh Minette, do you really live here, all by yourself, like this?" said she, as if there couldn't be anything more enchanting than to live the way I live. Then she came slowly to the mantelshelf and looked at the photographs. "And are these your belongings?" said she. I felt silly at telling her they were only my heroes, but she laughed in her delighted way—after a short pause. I should hate her to know about mother.

Then she strayed to the window and I told her about getting up on the box, and she rested her arms on the window-ledge.

"Above it all," said she. "Little Minette, all

by herself, above it all. Am I standing on your Sunday frock, Minette?"

I had on my Sunday frock. Or rather, blouse. I told her the tin box was full of father's manuscripts. I liked telling her that. She wanted to know more about father, but that would lead to mother. So I wouldn't say anything except that he wrote unsuccessful poetry.

She seemed to understand I didn't want to go on with the subject, and came back and settled on the bed and tucked her feet up beneath her, leaning on one hand, and still looking about her.

"I have always wanted to live quite alone," she said, "only I could not engage servants, and I could not do my own hair."

"How should you like to clean saucepans?" said
I.

"No, I could not," said Carol and glanced at her hands and mine.

Generally I am rather pleased with my hands; but her nails glittered. And the big ring flashed more brightly than ever, as if to emphasise the incongruity of diamonds and saucepans. It is awfully difficult not to compare.

I was getting rather nervous; it was nearly four; I asked if Jack Ford knew that she were coming. "Yes; Stephen's coming, and Peter," nodded Carol. "I wanted to see Jack about something, so I came early. He'll be sure to be back at half-past four."

Mr. Richard had said he would try to get here at four.

"If you want to lock up and go out, I can sit on the stairs," said Carol.

But she could not sit on the stairs knowing Mr. Richard and I were in here. I wondered if I could rush down and wait for Mr. Richard in the hall. But Carol said she wouldn't mind a little stroll with me if I were going out. So that was no good. I could only trust that Mr. Richard would be late.

I tried to make conversation by asking how Mr. Grainge was; he has not been at the office these last two days.

Carol let a rather impish smile peep out of her eyes; I can't imagine her respecting anyone.

"He's a little better," said she. "He's been very worried lately, then his digestion doesn't work. You never knew the Great King had a digestion did you, Minette?"

I wasn't going to let her make Mr. Grainge ridiculous. I said I knew he had worries.

"It's almost inconceivable that anything he puts his hand to shouldn't come off, but I'm very much afraid he's undertaken something that's a little beyond his weight. It's getting on top of him. When anything gets on top of you, you don't often pull it off. But this is lèse-majesté isn't it, little servant in the Temple of the Great King? How's the Knight?"

She asks the most dreadful questions, so suddenly and unexpectedly that she catches one out, each time.

"I leave the office behind on Saturday," said I, perfectly aware that I was crimson. "I want to hear about all of you. Do tell me about Sarah?"

"Sarah? Well, Sarah is very clever, and mad, quite mad," said Carol. "Do you believe in carrying banners, Minette? I should say you do."

If I had been in sympathy with the Suffragettes I wouldn't, I couldn't have let Carol laugh at me with them.

"I don't think they're mad, but I think they're wrong," said I.

"Well, as a matter of fact, they're mad but they're right," said Carol. "It is always mad to do what is logically and absolutely right, because it always leads one into the most awful trouble. It is such a mistake to think one does anything, either, by going against the tide."

"But one has to do what is right," said I.

"And do you always do it?" said she.

"When it's important," said I. She remained smiling at me, and I flamed and flamed.

"You can't think it's right for women to be treated exactly like men when they are so different," said I.

"Do you think they are treated the same now?" said Carol.

"No, but they want to be," said I.

"A few of them want to be given the same advantages and privileges and freedom as men enjoy," said Carol meditatively. "A few poor people are sensible enough to want to be given the same advantages and privileges and freedom as rich people enjoy. The women and the poor people have about equal chances of getting their wish."

"But women have their own special privileges and advantages," said I.

"All women?" said Carol.

"As much as all men," said I. I had to argue against her.

Carol made a pillow for her chin with one hand,

still leaning on the other. She is unbelievably slight and graceful.

"No women have real privileges and advantages, because no women have freedom as a natural thing," said Carol. "We have to pay for everything by being womanly."

"Men have to pay by being manly," said I. "My father couldn't fight, and what did he get?"

"Men are allowed to fight, and you don't get anything without fighting in this world," said Carol. "But men have made up that it isn't womanly to fight for what we want. It's unwomanly. Womanly women sit still and take what men like to give them, gratefully. Men give because they like people, not because people deserve it. It's not very easy to make men like us well enough to marry us; and you can't say there is no competition, and you can't say that competition is dignified. We are struggling to be liked by men, and our heart's desire is to make them struggle to be liked by us. Some of us succeed. Some of us are domestic and make a man think of feather pillows, and some of us are heady and make a man think of wine, and some of us worship and make a man feel always in the limelight, which method between me and you,

little Minette, is the most certain winner. I only wish I hadn't a sense of humour. I should have a much easier time, if I could seduce men into the belief that I saw them as heroes. But on the other hand, I have a better time by simply being heady."

Everything I loved and respected and believed in, seemed to crumble into foolishness as she talked. For the moment, it felt as if she were saying terrible truths. Only for the moment; the men I work for aren't like that. Sir Mordaunt and Mr. Grainge couldn't be twisted about.

"I believe in men," said I.

"You are such an idealist," said Carol, with her maddening slow smile. "I take the world as I find it. I get along beautifully because I know the game, but I know it is a rotten game. You're under such a disadvantage in thinking it's a splendid game, in which everyone is playing fair. You would never knowingly hit below the belt, would you? But that's the only place where hits count in the world's game. The Suffragettes are a little like you. They haven't left the men in ignorance of what they want; and they've refused to wheedle and make the men feel they're magnanimous Kings and Conquerors for granting them

the rights every human being ought to have, theoretically. They're silly enough to think they can win by fighting out in the open. And they'll get bruised and hurt and knocked down and stamped out flat. That's why they're mad. I know what is right just as well as Sarah does, but I am incurably sane."

"But nothing right would ever be done if people didn't stand out," said I. "I admire the Suffragettes because they are standing out in the open; if I thought them right, I should stand out with them, too."

"Leave the King?" said Carol, slipping into a prettier pose, if possible, with her head on her hand, half-lying.

"But I don't think they're right?" said I.

"But if you did, would you leave the Alliance?" persisted Carol, with her eyes fixed on me.

"I am pledged to an important work there," said I. "But if I weren't pledged to anything particular. . . ."

Carol laughed right out.

"Everyone's pledged to something—or someone—particular," said she. "The women would have had the vote years ago, if all their trusted Parliamentary friends hadn't been pledged to somebody or something particular. But you see human nature is always pledged to its own ends and the Woman's aim isn't the aim of human nature, and never will be."

"What do you call the women's aim?" said I.

"Justice, without bunkum. No sentiment, no idealizing, no romance, no illusion; in short, not the least littlest bit of glamour. Do you want that Minette? No. Do I want it? No. Only I'm honest about it, and you're not."

"I do believe in justice," said I. "Only men and women are different."

"Justice never differs," said Carol. "Same work; same pay; same conditions; that's justice."

"But men and women differ," said I. "Some of us must be in a lower place than others."

How could a woman rule my Fighting Line?

"Is it just that I wear clothes like this, do what I like, have what I like, and never do a hand's turn for anyone from one year's end to the other?" said Carol. "No, it's gross injustice, and long may gross injustice reign. Do you think I'd give up all the things I love, because of justice? Never. Nor will men."

"Some men would," said I.

I was seeing the men who had gone out into the

far corners of the world, the men who slaved in hill stations, the men—

"What about Mr. Ford?" said I. "He wants justice for everyone, including women."

Carol remained looking at me with the smile playing about her lips. I could tell she didn't even respect or believe in Jack Ford. Somehow I minded this worse than anything; because he has no business to be weak.

But of course she answered unexpectedly.

"Jack Ford thinks himself a humanitarian," said she. "He's really only an artist. Has he shown you his poems?"

It was a shock to hear that he wrote poetry.

"Some of them are quite charming," continued Carol. "He can write lyrics that bring the sun and the sea and woody places into the prettiest pictures that ever I've seen; and he also writes bushels of words; nasty, scientific, hideous words that come pelting you with facts like bushels of coal; clatter, clatter, oh so dusty and so dry. When he thinks he is a humanitarian he writes that way. He thinks it is humanitarian to dehumanize himself, because he is a poet, and poets never can understand we must take life as it is; they always want to alter it, or put something into

it that isn't there. You have the makings of a poet, Minette—" Carol turned over on her back, and lay looking up at the ceiling.

"In the interests of Art, I am humanizing Jack," said she. "He thinks he is successfully resisting; at present I am leaving him in that delusion. But some day I shall let him wake up and find he is just the ordinary man; probably his heart will break, and his vanity."

"I don't call him vain," said I. Who was she, anyway, to decide Jack Ford's fate like that?

"All men are vain; all flesh is grass," lilted Carol. "But when men become humble, and heart-broken, the artist in them flowers."

She lay there, smiling, like an inconsequent bit of thistle down. Just as innocent looking. Who could imagine a great hard root of cruel prickly thistles growing from a whiff of snow-white down? Coarse, overbearing thistles, sucking the goodness from the ground and planting themselves over a whole field.

When she talked of Jack Ford, I knew she was unfathomably cruel. For she meant to hurt him and master him. I heard it in every word.

She knew she had repelled me, I think, for she

turned over a little so that she could watch me, and spoke in a different voice.

"I haven't any ideals and no desire to do right," said she. "But some day I may get pounced on, Minette, the same as the rest of you. For I've a fear, a big, big fear; I think that's made me learn every move of the game. I'm afraid of not getting what I want. People like you are used to that, and you can grin and bear it, even though it isn't pleasant. But if I didn't get what I want, I don't know what would happen, for I want things so dreadfully. So I have to get them, and I always do." She whisked up with a sudden bubble of laughter, and sat crouching on the bed and laughing, and looking at me as if she had finished being serious for ever and ever.

"Sister Anne, Sister Anne, who's that upon the stair?" said she.

"Someone whom I think you know," said I.

I don't know that I've ever been more relieved than when I found Stephen and the Bird Boy on the landing. We knocked at Jack Ford's door again, but he wasn't in. Carol hailed them so they both came in, and were very enthusiastic about my sky parlour. Carol half lay and half sat on the bed, Stephen took the chair and asked

if he might draw her, and the Bird Boy stood before the grate and smothered his face as if he should burst if he didn't pull himself together, and then became astonishingly polite and wellmannered. As if he'd successfully thrown off the excitement.

I was talking to him when Mr. Richard walked straight in, without knocking. He stood as if he'd been shot. He looked glorious in his new palegrey tweed suit.

I can see Carol now, poised on one hand, starting up, surprised, her eyes fixed on Mr. Richard as if he were an apparition. But there was nothing awkward in her surprise.

"Oh, stay like that," sighed Stephen. That released the spell, Carol cast down her eyes in the demurest way; there was nothing for it but to introduce Mr. Richard as if he were a casual visitor.

"You know Miss Grainge, I think," said I. "This is—" I didn't know Stephen's or the Bird Boy's names. But what would Mr. Richard think if I said Stephen and Peter? I stood speechless like an idiot.

"I don't believe Minette knows your names," said Carol and opened dancing eyes.

"How delightful! Oh Minette, do give us names; don't you think I look like Mr. Smith-Ryn-Sympkin, do let it be Smith-Ryn-Sympkin," said the Bird Boy, giggling in the silliest manner.

"I should like to be Tudor-Plantagenet," said Stephen.

"Don't be idiots; why should Minette introduce you as anything but Stephen and Peter," said Carol. I think she meant to be kind.

Mr. Richard stood like an arrested thunderbolt; at any minute I expected him to fall on me. I never dreamed he could look so angry. The Bird Boy was still pleading in an excited way that I should make up a name; Stephen quenched him by saying, "Don't you, Minette!" as he went on drawing like a familiar friend. There was no chair for Mr. Richard; Carol pulled herself further up the bed and asked if that was room enough. It was at once a relief and agony when he sat down.

It didn't seem to occur to them to go; the Bird Boy asked if Mr. Richard had been up before, and as Mr. Richard glared at him, added that I fitted into my room like a nut into its shell.

Stephen contributed his share by saying it was a ripping light, and Carol must sit again to him.

Carol said they were both behaving very badly, and peeped at the Bird Boy as if it were all a tremendous joke; which convulsed him, of course, with laughter.

I could not sit there like a dummy. I said, "What about tea?" and Stephen and the Bird Boy flew to help me with the kettle. I hadn't enough cups and Stephen went to see if he could get into Jack Ford's room and found the door unlocked, and returned with biscuits as well as cups. If I hadn't looked out, they might all have waited there.

They are so friendly, that it was natural for them to help themselves to Jack Ford's things, but it gave a wrong impression to Mr. Richard. Especially when Peter said, "We must remember to wash up this time, mustn't we Minette?" How I wished I hadn't told them that little joke about the frying-pan. It appeared as if I borrowed habitually from Jack Ford, ran in and out, oh dear, oh dear!

The preparations for tea didn't help much; Mr. Richard sat on the edge of the bed, frowning horribly and stiff as stiff. And then, as I was putting the tea into the pot, I saw a little picture in the looking-glass. Carol was looking at Mr.

Richard, an appealing look as if she knew she had been caught; and then, as he stared at her, still sulky, she put into her eyes the prettiest, funniest, coaxing smile, as if to say: "Yes, it's awful, but do see the funny side; I'm here to have fun with you."

I saw the glint wake up in Mr. Richard's eyes, only it was for Carol.

I stood by the fire, putting in the tea as slowly as possible. I could not turn and face them; I knew they would be sitting there not looking at each other, when I did.

As they were.

Carol was quite at her ease. It amused her to play at being a naughty child, on the brink of some tremendous danger; and she did it as charmingly as she did everything else. She made little remarks with her eyes cast down and then peeped out at Stephen or Peter, to make them laugh, pointedly not looking at Mr. Richard, as if he were somebody terribly important whom she was making fun of. I cut bread and butter and poured tea and couldn't say a word. When I put more hot water into the pot, I looked into the glass again, and found Mr. Richard was looking at Carol, and though her eyes were steadily

looking away, I knew she was going to give him a glance. I stood there pouring the water drop by drop, to give her all the time she needed; and sure enough she did glance up for a second.

I think Carol understood the situation, and meant to relieve me by going. She put on her hat in the precious, smiling way I had noticed the first time I saw her. It's funny that I was afraid even then. The men stood up, watching and eager to wait on her; Stephen held her hat pins, the Bird Boy fastened a glove, after she had tried very hard to do it herself. Mr. Richard alone stood back. But when she had gone, he said, "I'm afraid I must be going too," and went downstairs three at a time.

He probably wanted to put things right with Carol. I can see it would never do if she went home and told Mr. Grainge; I am sure Mr. Richard felt he ought to explain; and after all, he has met Carol before.

But he hasn't met her in the queer, informal, adventurous way in which they met this afternoon. She will know how to make the adventure attractive. Whatever she does is attractive. And Mr. Richard loves to be in things; the way she set him out of things, would pique him terribly.

He would insist on being in things; it is dangerous to be in things with Carol.

I must not think of her.

If she has won, let me take my licking decently. Jealousy is the meanest fault; I am not going to sit here and pick faults in Carol; it was mean to watch her and Mr. Richard; but I had to know. I'd rather know than not. One can at least say, "Very well. Now I must stand up by myself alone, and make the best of it." The awful thing would be to cling to a person who had changed his mind.

If Mr. Richard had truly cared for me, he would have stayed. He knows what he is to me. He could not hurt me like this if he truly cared.

I must not think of him.

The Bird Boy and Stephen found it dull without Carol; there was such a sense of anti-climax when she'd gone. They talked about her a little. The Bird Boy said someone must tell her not to paint; it was so vulgar; and Stephen said he didn't agree at all, everyone did it. Stephen looked out of the window; the Bird Boy yawned. I had really nothing to say to them. They soon went.

Mr. Richard will never, never understand how it is they call me Minette and I call them Stephen and Peter, although I do not yet know their real names.

I wonder if he'll come back. If he cares—but being angry is a sort of proof that he cares. If he doesn't come back, it may be that he is angry. He told me he was jealous. Being jealous is a proof that he cares.

Ten P.M.

I have reason to be grateful to Jack Ford. He has taken me out of myself.

It was unmanly of him to faint like that, but it has been a heaven-sent blessing to have had something to do. I heard someone dragging himself upstairs, resting on each step, and wondered what it could be. Someone groaned outside on the landing, and instead of looking out, I had a silly fear, and locked my door. The someone dragged into Jack Ford's room, and I heard a thud, and then came a terrible silence. I knew I ought to go in, but I couldn't help thinking how awful it would be if Mr. Richard did come back, and found me in Jack Ford's room, even if he were ill. In my heart I knew Mr. Richard would mind worse if Jack Ford were ill.

So I stood by the door listening, and then I

tried to read, and then I looked into the fire, and all the time my Fighting Line said, "Coward, Coward; you are deserting somebody in real trouble." At last, I went out on the landing and listened; no sound came from his room. I leaned over the bannisters but no one was below. If I had heard Mr. Richard coming, I should have been mean enough to go back to my room, and let Jack Ford alone.

As I stood there, I told myself I had done quite enough for Jack Ford that afternoon and had spoiled my happiness, and wasn't going to be a fool again. But I knew I should have to go in; the door was partly open; I nearly tumbled over Jack Ford in a heap on the floor. I lit the gas and found his face was cut and dirty and his clothes covered with mud and his collar gone; he looked like a tramp.

He was lying in an uncomfortable position breathing heavily. I propped him against a chair and went for some hot water. When I came back, he was looking round in a stupid way; I told him not to talk and washed his face. He had been cut and scratched pretty badly. He shivered and asked if I had a fire, but I couldn't have him in my room. I told him I'd light his fire for him and

helped him up onto the chair and found wood and paper. His chimney smoked to-night and the coals would not catch. The smoke came into the room and made us cough.

I didn't feel kind. All the time I was listening for Mr. Richard; but Jack Ford looked so white, I dared not go. He kept shivering too. His room was icy cold. Mine was as warm as a toast. But I wouldn't ask him in.

I went back and piled up the fire in case Mr. Richard should return. The draught was on my side of the house to-day; I stayed by my fire knowing I was a selfish wretch.

Then came a timid tap and Jack Ford came in to say his fire was out, might he stay for five minutes; he felt he should die if he couldn't get warm. He dropped down into my big chair and there he was.

I sat on the tin box and watched Jack Ford recover. It felt as if everything I had possessed had been taken away from me, including my room. Jack Ford hadn't any idea of going; he lay back, weak and tired, gazing at the flames. When at last he spoke, he said it was lucky our chimneys didn't smoke alike.

I asked if he were better, pointedly.

He said no, he didn't think he was, and shuddered again.

I hadn't any curiosity about what had happened, I only wanted him to go; but presently he pulled himself together, and told me he'd been at the Pavilion, and there had been a row, and a lot of arrests had been made. Sarah was taken.

He shut his eyes as if he were seeing something awful.

It was a shock to hear Sarah had gone to prison. I said I supposed it was only nominal imprisonment; but Jack Ford said she was in for a bad time. I asked him how he'd escaped and he said because his courage had given out; when it came to the point, he found himself fighting like a madman and had got away. He had meant to be taken this afternoon. He had given in his name. He was down for the hunger strike. But when it came to the pull, he hadn't the courage.

I had always thought there could be nothing more contemptible than a coward. But somehow, as he told me, I didn't scorn him. I was mildly sorry for him because he had failed. And I felt he had been rather plucky.

He wasn't ashamed either, only sick and revolted at the whole miserable business. As we talked, I could see him growing better, and I began to care about Mr. Richard coming, a little less. When Jack Ford asked if I could give him a hot drink, I brewed him some coffee, and had some myself, with his biscuits. I had to explain how they came in my room, and so the story of my tea-party came out.

He had not expected his friends though he was generally in to tea on Saturdays. He said he was so glad I'd been in, it was such a lot of stairs to climb for nothing. Not till then did I realize his friends had now started the habit of dropping in on me when Jack Ford was out. I told him straight out that my room was very small and it was rather awkward when my own friends were coming; this afternoon, for instance, I had been expecting someone from the office.

"So you're making friends!" said he.

"Yes and I'm afraid my friends don't quite hit it off with your friends," said I. "The friend this afternoon was rather shocked at your friends calling me Minette."

Jack Ford smiled as if I had said a funny joke.

"I suppose Carol is alarming," said he, "to people who don't know her."

He sat comfortably in his chair, enjoying the

fire, and chuckling at the thought of Carol and my friends.

"My friend was not alarmed," said I coldly. I had to snub him. "As a matter of fact, he knew Carol."

I knew Carol would give me away, and I might as well give my version first. I tried to speak in an ordinary way; when one speaks right out about things, people never think anything.

"He is the Knight I work for," said I.

"You don't mean Carol knows him?" said Jack Ford.

I nodded. "I work for her father," said I.

Jack Ford sat open-mouthed. I could have killed him.

"It was naturally overwhelming to come to tea and find my room filled with people," said I-"In fact it was so uncomfortable that my own friend had to clear out." My eyes were ridiculously wet.

"Carol made it uncomfortable for him, did she!" said Jack Ford, frowning at the fire.

"Oh no," said I, "things were generally uncomfortable in such a pack. It wasn't Carol's fault. She tried to ease the situation by going." I managed a sort of laugh.

"And didn't it?" said Jack Ford.

"Well, he had to go, too, then," said I. My eyes became silly again. I knelt and poked the fire hard.

I was afraid Jack Ford guessed something. I don't know what I should do if he had done. But I don't think he did. He is so occupied with his own concerns.

He was thinking now of his afternoon.

"It's pretty rotten, seeing women being tortured," said he. "But they've got to fight it out themselves. It was only feeble human sympathy that has led me into this beastly mess. They've got to clean out their own stable. We can't do it for them. Oh, it is a beastly job, too."

How trivial and theoretical all that Suffrage business sounded when one had a real trouble. But I braced myself to answer. He might have suspected something if I hadn't.

"Men have always protected women; the really manly men, and they always will," said I.

"Have you ever thought—really thought—what the word, protection means?" said Jack Ford.

I thought it a beautiful idea that the strong should protect the weak and said so. My mouth

seemed to go on talking while I listened for a footstep on the stair. Though I hardly dared to want him to come with Jack Ford sitting there.

"Ah, but I mean, when a man takes a woman under his protection," said he. "The accepted meaning of the word. Isn't it ironical that the world calls it protection when a man plunders a woman of everything that makes her womanhood respected? Mind you, I don't altogether blame the men. Women have got to become strong enough to defend themselves. They've got to claim proper salaries and make themselves worth it and refuse to be kept in marriage or out of it."

I said I simply would not talk about such things. I had to stop him. My cheeks burned.

"But what'll happen if you don't see where this bunkum about man and woman's leading us all into?" said Jack Ford. "Here you are, living up here alone, with absolutely no protection from society. You have no business to shut your eyes in this ostrich way."

I said I was shutting them because I was dead tired, and I loathed the way he talked of such things, and I wouldn't have it. Jack Ford settled himself in his chair, my chair, and took in a long

breath ready to begin. I suddenly got up; I couldn't stand it.

"Look here," said I. "I respect men; there's the proof I do," I stood with my Fighting Line, defending them. "I hate the way in which you talk about them. I won't give up my ideals. I'm grateful to the men who have made England what it is—"

"Good Lord, what is it? England, what it is?" groaned Jack Ford. "The slums of England, or the brothels?"

"I won't discuss," said I. "Get out of my chair and go."

Jack Ford sat looking at me as if I were a maniac. Then he rubbed his head and got up.

"You're tired," said he.

"I'm tired of you," said I, and that was an excuse for the tears.

"I say, have I been a brute," said he.

"I don't care what you are. Go," said I.

He blinked and blinked and stood there; then he rubbed his hair again, shook his head gravely, and went out. It seems incredible I should have been so rude. But I don't care. I've got to frighten everyone away. He mustn't be allowed to come again.

It is mid-night now. Mr. Richard can't possibly come. And yet I can't go to bed, in case he should be sorry; he might think of me when he was coming out of a theatre or some place, and come posting off to make friends; it would be just like him. I could have sworn we never could be separated again.

I think my Fighting Line would lock the door and go to bed, and count and count until they went to sleep.

# CHAPTER X

#### THE OFFICE OUTRAGED

April 18th, Monday.

As I thought, Mr. Richard had been angry; he had had to go after Carol to explain; he says if I had any consideration for him, I should not have subjected him to that sort of thing; he cannot come to my room again; he can't run the risk.

They have taken my room from me.

I have offered to give up being friends with all of them, but he says it's easier said than done to shake oneself free from people of that type. Whatever I said or did, if it suited their convenience they would drop in. He is quite right. They can't be offended. Besides, as he says, if I told them not to come, they would only think he had put his foot down. Now they know about him, the only possible course is to steer clear of the whole business. He says he will arrange for us to meet elsewhere.

May 1st, Friday.

Mr. Richard is taking a cottage up the river for week ends. I am to come down one Saturday. Now the summer's coming it is only natural that he should want to get away from London at the week ends. It will be very jolly to go down there one Saturday. He says he shan't fill the place with visitors when I come.

I have drawn two pounds out of the bank, my first encroachment on my savings. But I must have a new spring suit. My coat and skirt are so shabby.

# May 6th, Wednesday.

I couldn't get anything decent under three guineas; and my last year's hat is out of date. It isn't worth retrimming. What a long time it took to save four pounds, and how soon it's gone.

### May 7th, Thursday.

I wore my new things to the office to-day. Miss Beckles and Miss Patten asked where I was going; they admire the hat immensely but the coat wrinkles under the arms, and isn't quite right in the neck. Ready-made things never fit. Miss

Beckles thinks it will wear into shape. I said, as if in joke, that I should wear it to the office for a few days till the wrinkles went. But that didn't explain the hat. I said it was really cheaper in the end to get a good one.

## May 8th, Friday.

Mr. Richard took me out to lunch to-day. He would give anything to have me in his room again. He is so busy now the season's on, it's almost impossible to get an evening, and he has to be down at the cottage so much, getting it into order. After lunch he took me to choose chintzes, the man called me Madam, it was obvious he thought—Mr. Richard was awfully amused.

I came back late, and Mr. Grainge had sent for me, and Miss Patten had had to go in to him instead. I felt pretty bad.

But oh, I see so little of Mr. Richard now.

To-day has been something to keep and remember.

The money he spends though. Cost is no object to him. The cottage must be a dream. I am to go down to tea directly it is ready.

My new blouse will be finished. I needn't wear my coat.

May 12th, Tuesday.

The Women's Rebellion cannot be extinguished. They have now begun an organized campaign on the City; it seems incredible that the post-office can't protect the pillar-boxes. This guerilla business is making everyone jumpy. However many are sent to prison, others come up, persistently; and that dreadful W. S. P. U. goes on. I asked Miss Beckles what we should do if men began to fight when they weren't satisfied with the law; she said they did, if they were dissatisfied enough. No one gave you anything in this world unless you asked for it, and every business woman ought to be delighted at the changes that were coming. I said, business people are the first who ought to uphold the sanctity of the pillar-boxes.

Mr. Grainge and Mr. Richard are furious. It is wicked that women should disgrace our sex like this. I hate being a woman when I hear men talking of the Suffragettes. They say they ought to be flogged. Mr. Richard was particularly annoyed; someone wrote back to suggest he applied to the Government for a shipload from the W. S. P. U. as they'd settle any country they were sent to. I wish those women could know how they

make the other sort of women suffer. Though they would probably not mind. Miss Beckles is dead to every sense of chivalry or self-respect. She laughed brutally when I told her I hated meeting a man, I was so ashamed, and said it was a healthy sign when women began to wake up to their feebleness. We had to realize how we were looked down on before we could improve.

Miss Patten pointed out we never used to be looked down on, but looked up to and set on pedestals, and asked what would become of the English home if women lost their womanhood?

Miss Beckles said it might become comfortable and efficient. The way the average home was run by the average domestic woman, would bring a business into bankruptcy. She asked what we should do if the clerks left every three months or so, and Mr. Grainge and Sir Mordaunt spent their days talking over our faults and their helplessness to cope with them. But until women learned to respect themselves, they would never be able to be respected, whether by their children, or their servants, or their husbands, brothers, fathers, uncles, and the rest. Miss Patten cried at the end.

I felt more like throwing a ruler at her.

But it annoys her most when I keep on typing.

It stands to reason that the strongest always govern, and women are physically weak. Miss Beckles says we should be strong if we eat the dinners Mr. Grainge and Mr. Richard do; if we're weak we need feeding up. She puts things so coarsely. The most irritating thing about her arguments is that I can see, in a way, they're true.

But I will keep my ideals. They mean everything to me.

# May 14th, Thursday.

As I came through the streets and saw the placards about the Northern Mail Disaster, how little I thought of its effect on me or anyone I knew. But through that, the Alliance is plunged into a whirlpool, and the great Settlers Aid Scheme may founder.

Mr. Richard was in Mr. Grainge's room and I went in to them both. I ran into Mr. Benson; he had been summoned to know if there was nothing from Edinburgh this morning; there wasn't.

It seemed Mr. Grainge had had a wire last night to say notes for five thousand pounds had been sent in to the Settlers Aid Fund, unregistered by accident; the wire had been signed by some such name as Dalkeith. He was practically certain it was Dalkeith but he had torn it up without thinking. Yesterday was the last day of the Wharfage Concession that was all important to our scheme. On receiving the wire, he had sent off his own cheque for the amount, thinking he could pay in the notes to his own Bank this morning.

Now what were we to do?

For all the serious nature of the affair, it was glorious to be consulting there with Mr. Grainge and Mr. Richard. Business is like war sometimes. Here I was with my officers, meeting an emergency. The first step was to telephone the Bank and stop Mr. Grainge's cheque. He gave me his chequebook, and I noted down the number of the counterfoil. He had sent it off as he was leaving the office and the ink still looked fresh. Then Mr. Richard got through to the Concessionaires and explained.

The notes would be sent over at noon when the second post came in. The Concessionaires weren't very pleasant; they had not received Mr. Grainge's cheque, and wanted to know why Mr. Grainge couldn't send another. Mr. Grainge spoke to them then: very excited about his cheque having been lost, too.

The Concessionaires had had another important

letter held up. Of course the Government ought to do something. But Mr. Grainge was angry. He took up the Postal Guide when he put down the receiver and suddenly said those notes must have caught the post last night, for he had had the wire at five, before he left the office, and the letter then had gone or the man would not have wired about it being unregistered. It ought to have been here this morning.

Mr. Richard burst out with, "Why, sir, they came off by the Northern Mail."

"Oh that explains the delay then," said Mr. Grainge, relieved, and no wonder.

But Mr. Richard was hunting through the newspaper.

"No, sir. The mail-bags are missing," said he. "They're afraid they're burnt."

"God, and I've torn up that wire. Fool, not to send his address on it. Who's Dalkeith?" said Mr. Grainge.

"We shall have to ask the Edinburgh postmaster to look up every wire sent yesterday," said Mr. Richard, meeting the position with a quickness that made my heart leap.

"The post-office wasn't a name I knew; I had the idea it was close to Edinburgh; was the office Dalkeith? I've got that quite clear," said Mr. Grainge.

Mr. Richard had out the Directory. Mr. Grainge's face was purpling, his eyes stared out fixedly.

"Search the waste paper baskets," said Mr. Richard.

"But the cleaners empty them," said I. "We should have to find where the bits go."

"That's absurd," said Mr. Grainge. "No, get down the Directory. We must send to every Dalkeith in it, and you can write the postmaster as you suggested; it's a good idea. Now I must handle those Concessionaires again. Ring up the Wharfage Agency, Miss Blunt, and put me through. Get out a letter to the Dalkeiths, Richard, and explain the situation; here, perhaps I'd better do it."

Mr. Grainge called in Mr. Richard a little later to say he had got a seven-days' extension with great difficulty. Now we had to raise the money. We were still four thousand, eight fifty off. They were closeted together, talking of possible steps, in case the unknown donor couldn't be found in time. Would Sir Mordaunt advance the money? But Sir Mordaunt has frankly said the Settlers Aid

won't go through, and he isn't likely to help it to. Mr. Grainge pins all his hopes on the Wharfage Concession; if we can announce that that is definitely obtained, he can trust the public to respond. And if this Settlers Aid goes well, he has heard of a quarter where the Irrigation Scheme will find favour. All this delayed the ordinary work, and those Dalkeiths were interminable. I hope I shall never hear that name again. I can see it now wherever I look. But it has been fine to be working with men, real men, to-day. And Mr. Richard has asked me to go down to the cottage Saturday. The two-fifteen.

He's going down to-morrow afternoon, specially, so that it will be finished. The men do nothing unless he is there. And he wants me to see it at its best.

The thought made me able to type to all those Dalkeiths blithely.

## May 15th, Friday.

The day began badly. A silly little quarrel with Miss Beckles on the stairs. I asked if she approved of train-wrecking, and she said it would be well if the press devoted a tenth of the abuse they lavished on the Suffragettes, to the Railway

Commission and Directors. Women weren't out after human life for the sake of dividends. They hadn't wrecked the Northern Mail.

I got upstairs, hot and cross; and wanting to slay every woman in sight. Then Mr. Grainge sent for me.

Mr. Richard had gone off, and I was to take his letters.

Nothing had been heard about the notes, and the post-office could find nothing. Someone had suggested an appeal through the Press, and Mr. Grainge asked if I could stay late and get it off. I said I could.

"We've never touched the Scottish Press," said he thoughtfully. "It may be a good way of introducing the Settlers Aid Scheme to the notice of the very people who'd be interested. We'll get a letter into the little country sheets, that are read from end to end. Where do our settlers come from? The glens, the lochs, the little town and hamlets. Get the Press Guide."

He dictated a wonderful letter, setting out the situation so clearly that the most ignorant country man could understand. He said we must appeal to the heart or Scottish people would never loose the purse-strings; they were so sentimental; quite

different from us. He spoke of the flood of help that had been pouring in which the pillar-box depredations had cut off. This was news to me; but I couldn't stop him to ask about it. Then he mentioned his own cheque having been sent, and told how it had miscarried through the pillar-box affair, and how the Concession had been nearly lost thereby. He expatiated on the heartlessness of the women who were thus disorganizing the entire community and causing thousands of helpless men and women to lose the chance of starting life in favourable conditions; he made a great point of the pillar-box outrages. Of course people are very stirred up about them, and if the Concessionaires had been firm, the delay might have lost us the Concession.

It was a good letter. It made one feel the magnitude of the scheme and the unselfishness of its promoters, and the cruel way in which their efforts were being hindered by these furies of Suffragettes; and every mother or father who had a son out in the Colonies, or who cared for the Empire, would surely be touched and stirred by it.

I told Mr. Grainge I should send every penny I had if I read such a letter in the paper, and had any pennies to send, and he laughed so nicely. He

said it was a big load off his shoulders that he could leave the whole thing now to me. He was going off to the Norfolk Broads for the week end, out of reach of letters, and he could do it with a free heart. I am to type each letter so that it looks like an intimate personal appeal, and the whole lot are to be sent off to-morrow. Two hundred and seventy-seven. As I got up, he said: "How much are you getting?" and I said twenty-five shillings.

"That's too little," said he. "It shall be thirty." He values me. This is real promotion.

If Miss Beckles and I hadn't quarrelled, I should have asked her to help me, but I couldn't have accepted help from her after the things she'd said about the Settlers; and she wouldn't have typed out those remarks about the pillar-box outrages, in connection with the Northern Mail affair, which she maintains is not a Suffragette outrage. Miss Patten was going out to a whist drive, and nothing could have kept her from going home early to dress—so I was left by myself. I typed till my fingers became like pencils, or matches, with no feel to them; and the clicks struck on my brain till I felt dented through and through. But the pile grew higher and higher and I hoped I should

get off to-morrow after all. Hurley was such a refreshment to think about.

The brooms of the cleaners thumped eerily along the corridors for there was no one in the office now but me. And then one of them pushed open my door, a blear-eyed, slinking creature. She began to clean, and finally came near me; I can see her now looking up from the linoleum like an animal.

"I came across summat tother night as they say might be valuable," said she, "in the waste-paper basket downstairs."

She had some scraps of paper in her hand; I gave a gasp; the thought of the missing telegram flashed into mind.

"I've been told as the stamp's worth something; they say a stamp's always worth its money even if its tore, and this ain't torn, perhaps you could tell, Miss? I kept the bits; it seemed such a funny thing to tear a document with a stamp on that's worth money, though I've found postage stamps in the baskets, twice I have, and they say finding's keeping."

She put the bits down on my desk; I found myself looking at the number I had telephoned the Bank about; the number on the missing cheque. There the fragments were, only they were the pieces of a blank cheque as far as I could see. Part was missing.

I paid her a penny for the stamp, after I'd explained she couldn't use it.

But Mr. Grainge had referred to the pillar-box outrages three times; his appeal was interwoven with references to his missing cheque.

It seemed an easy thing at first, to disentangle the issues, now the missing cheque was found; but it wasn't. When I had prepared a paraphase, it was absurdly bald and unconvincing. I couldn't send it out. But what would Mr. Grainge say if I sent out his original letter after his missing cheque had been brought to me? At the same time, he wouldn't be pleased if I altered his letter into a bald, uninteresting one.

I sat there for an hour thinking what I ought to do.

I couldn't help remembering that I couldn't possibly retype all those letters and get off to Hurley by the 2.15 to-morrow.

But if I could see clearly what I ought to do, I'd do it.

I didn't as I sat there, and I don't now. I can try to wire to Mr. Grainge to-morrow morning and ask for instructions though he said he was going cruising and its unlikely I can get into touch. If Mr. Richard were here, I could ask him.

But there's no one.

And if the letters don't go off to-morrow and there's nothing in the Scottish papers on Monday, and we don't raise the money in time and the Wharfage Concession goes—

Well, it's no use meeting trouble half-way.

Oh dear, I did want to look my best to-morrow. I wish I had something that would make me go to sleep.

### CHAPTER XI

#### A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

May 15th, Saturday.

MR. RICHARD says I have done wrong.
I ought to have stayed and finished the letters.

Mr. Richard thinks I ought to have sent them. He thinks I ought to send them now. He doesn't attach importance to the fact that a statement in it is wrong. Oh, I wish I knew what I should do. If I send them out, knowing what I know, it will be like betraying the honour of the Alliance. I can't understand Mr. Richard thinking truth unimportant. The Alliance couldn't send out an appeal with a lie in it, even if the lie wasn't intentional. For, of course, Mr. Grainge thought the missing cheque had been posted. I can't now see how it was destroyed and thrown away.

Well, I have got to choose between standing by the Alliance and obeying Mr. Richard, and I must put the Alliance first. It's one thing to leave it to marry Mr. Richard; another, to send out a false statement over Mr. Grainge's name. I know Mr. Grainge will recognize this; the only thing that I can't feel happy about is having gone to Hurley. I hope that won't come out. I can't understand Mr. Richard's attitude. He spoke as if I had been presumptuously disloyal. He was angry, so angry. . . . Yet we love each other, though we understand each other so little. Until I spoke about the letters, the afternoon was a dream of bliss. I think in my heart I was afraid he would be angry, for I put off telling him about it, although it was all-important.

I can hear the splish-splash of the water against the punt in a gurgling murmur as we met the current. Mr. Richard poles beautifully. His flannels glistened with snowy freshness; he stood like a young king, commanding the waters, directing the punt with the easiest of touches. He is so strong, that whatever he does is easy. I lay back feeling no responsibility; I belonged to him, and my day was in his hands. He made fun all the time; the sun and the greenness and rippling water spring-cleaned us; everyone we passed looked happy; I could scarcely believe I was on the river

in the newest-shaped punt with a boating man. It was such a glorious afternoon, Mr. Richard had brought down a tea hamper so that we could stay as late as possible on the water. We were to have supper at the cottage.

We pulled in to the bank at last, under a tree bursting with new green scarcely enough to shade us; Mr. Richard made me take off my hat to see if there was any gold in my hair. He said it was jolly with the sun on it. We boiled a kettle in the punt, and Mr. Richard produced delicious cakes from aluminum boxes. I never dreamed there could be such a hamper. We ate an enormous tea; Mr. Richard was in a teasing mood; it was such fun, such fun. He told me he was going to practise being my lord and master as I'd been getting a little out of hand lately. My spirits went up like magic when he said this, for ever since that wretched afternoon when he met Carol, I had felt things were a little different. But it must have been only fancy. He may have been jealous at finding Jack Ford's friends with me. When he is jealous, it proves he cares. He ordered me about to-day, for fun; told me to smile, told me to look at him, told me to put something before Mr. Richard, he likes me to call him that, no one else

does. He says it's my claim that I've staked out; it sounded too dreadfully presumptuous to say what he made me say: "dear Mr. Richard," "darling Mr. Richard." We love each other, oh, we love each other. He must see it is my greatest happiness to obey him.

Yet all the time, back of my mind, I knew we were snapping our fingers at something bigger than ourselves; I never, never lose that sense of insecurity. It is too easy for Mr. Richard to be nice to people. He makes daring remarks and laughs to see the effect, because he is light-hearted. I can't feel he would be different with any other girl. It is true I belong to him, and am, as he says, different from everybody else, but all the same—

And now I have defied him.

He says I don't appear to realize what I have done.

He has never been angry in this way before.

After tea, we lay there quiet and drowsy, and Mr. Richard said he felt like sleeping. Now he was peaceful, I began to think of my problem again; I hoped Mr. Richard would understand as he idealized the Alliance just as I did. So I asked if I might talk business; I told him I wanted his advice. He turned over lazily and took my hand

and laid his face in it in a sleepy way and told me to fire ahead.

So I fired.

He didn't take it in for a bit. He didn't really wake up till I told him about the cleaner and the cheque, when he said, "What cheque?" and I had to explain all over again. When I came to the point, that the cheque Mr. Grainge had lost in the post had been found, he sat up and whistled, and then laughed in a roguish way which puzzled, and still puzzles me; as if I'd been telling him a joke. Then he put his arm round me and kissed my forehead and told me to stop frowning. His advice was to burn the torn-up cheque and neither speak nor think again about it. When I began to tell him that I had stopped the letters, he ordered me to quit the subject; I was taking it much too seriously. "Leave Grainge to paddle his own canoe and we'll paddle ours," said he.

"But I've not sent the letters and I've got to tell Mr. Grainge why on Monday," said I.

He stared down on me as if I had defied someone—something—I can't explain.

"My dear child, you must go straight back and send them, then," said he. "Take it from me,—if you want to keep your job at the Alliance and miss the most thundering row you've ever been in, in the whole of your blessed little life!"

"It's too late," said I.

"Oh no, it isn't, you must catch the five-fortynine," said he. "You can do it, if you start in the next quarter of an hour; I'm beastly sorry, but you've got to get those letters off to-night."

"I couldn't possibly; they're not typed," said I.
"I could hardly have typed them if I'd stayed till
mid-night yesterday; and all this afternoon. I
could never have come down here."

"You've not done them?" said Mr. Richard staring as if I were crazy.

"I stopped when the cheque turned up," said I. And then I pulled myself up and tried to defend myself. "Mr. Grainge had trusted me with the whole thing," said I. "I had to take the responsibility of stopping them. I'm not a brainless machine; he left a big job in my hands, knowing I was responsible, and he must feel he can trust me to meet any emergency that may arise."

"You little fool!" said Mr. Richard.

He stared at me as if I were a disobedient dog, with the same angry surprise. My cheeks burn to remember.

"The honour of the Alliance is at stake," said

I. I don't think I shewed how he had hurt. "There was a misstatement in Mr. Grainge's letter."

"That's his business, not yours," said Mr. Richard. He knows me so well, he feels he can be rude. He isn't accountable for the way he speaks when he's suddenly put out.

"He had trusted that business to me," said I.
"Would you have sent the letters if you'd been in my place?"

"How could I say what I'd do in your place," snapped Mr. Richard, angrier than ever. "I know this, there'll be a colossal row on Monday, and if you'll take my advice you'll get back as fast as you can, write a few letters to some papers at the end of the list, just pick out a few, nicely scattered, and then send off what you've done and if the others don't appear, trust that Grainge will think they've been crowded out. You can get the second batch done on Sunday."

"And not tell him?" said I.

"Of course not," said Mr. Richard; "what am I thinking all this out for? Come along. You'll have to look sharp."

"I couldn't possibly do as you say," said I.

"My dear girl, I'm being firm for your sake; no afternoon's worth the unholy row you'll land us both in, possibly, if you don't do as I tell you," said Mr. Richard.

"I don't want to stay here; that isn't it," said I. It was as much as I could do to speak at all. That Mr. Richard should think I was insisting on staying with him——

"We'll finish the argument on the way to the station," said Mr. Richard with a look in his face I had never seen; a grim, determined look; there was no love in it now.

I got up. I wasn't going to argue. I made up my mind not to say another word till we were on the platform—then he should know I wasn't going to obey. But not till I had proved I didn't want to stay with him.

The walk to the station was a nightmare. Mr. Richard thought I had given in, and spoke more kindly; I wish he hadn't. He went on with his plan about my mixing up the letters so that too many A-s and B-s shouldn't appear on Monday. He gave me his private key so that I could get in on Sunday without being noticed. As I said, "Yes, I see," at intervals, he became friendlier, and when the station came in sight, began about how wretched he should be without me and how he'd been looking forward to seeing me in his cottage,

and how I must come again. Not next week end, because his people would be down, and it wouldn't be wise to put them off. He said we must not let Grainge know I hadn't been at the office this afternoon if it could possibly be helped, as Grainge was so sharp he might put two and two together. Then he said duty was duty and he knew I should be a little brick about it, and he only wished he could come back with me and help me. Still it was for the Alliance, wasn't it?

I could say "Yes" with a full heart, at this. What I am doing, is indeed for the Alliance. Not till I was in the train, did I speak.

"I'm going back," said I, "but I'm not going to send those letters, because it would be dishonourable to do so."

The train was moving; Mr. Richard hurried along beside me, more startled than I could believe. His jaw had dropped.

"What, what?" he stuttered.

"So I shan't want your office key," said I, and threw it on the platform as he dropped back from the window. Then I sat back on the seat. I don't know what the ladies at the other end of the carriage thought of the episode. I have been trying to digest what has happened ever since.

Mr. Richard doesn't share my ideas about the honour of the Alliance.

If my Fighting Line had been entrusted with the honour of a Cause, they would have stood by it. Mr. Grainge will understand. He is older and wiser than Mr. Richard. I can see how Mr. Richard is swayed by his love and admiration for Mr. Grainge. He doesn't want me to do anything that could seemingly reflect upon his hero's carelessness, his sagacity, his omnipotence! For Mr. Grainge has been careless to make such a mistake about that cheque. But great men are glad to be saved from the results of their mistakes. Specially when truth would be imperilled, otherwise.

I know Mr. Grainge will understand, and after this he will know how I feel to him and the Alliance.

I don't believe my Fighting Line were ever in a corner where more courage was needed, than when I came out of the station. When the shops and offices are shut, London is terrifying. One sees the bigness of it in cold blood. As I walked up Victoria Street it was as if the tide had receded,

leaving monstrous rocks that loomed up, shadowing everything.

I was an idiot to go back to the City, but I wanted to read the letter again, to see if it could be altered. Of course, the office was shut up and the caretaker away.

How dare London stop working? What Power is it that makes the City pause, sweeps all the tide of life out of it, leaves it cold and empty every week end?

This lovely afternoon the workers were in every part of the country resting and frivolling and recreating their used-up selves. How wonderful it seems that humanity should be allowed the week end, and even London be unable to suck us in. The great, cold, inhuman blocks of offices glittered blankly, the warehouses were dark and dead, the shop fronts screamed their messages to empty streets, and in the silence, the arrogant clutch of this god called Business, could be seen for what it was-ugly, merciless, and cold. Yet the god was only waiting. On Monday we should all be sucked back into the area where he ruled, and the tide would roar about the rocks and the Powers would struggle, and in the midst of the thickest whirl of the currents, I would have to battle. As I walked the streets, I saw Mr. Grainge as the god, who was waiting, waiting.

Monday, May 17th.

Black Monday. Black Monday.

Looking back, I can see I was terribly afraid; I shouldn't have needed to feel so terribly brave if underneath there hadn't been the consciousness of danger. Just as soldiers going into action need all the drums and bugles and banners possible to excite them, and beat down the fear, so I had to keep in mind my Fighting Line and think of myself as an ensign bearing the colours for the army and all that sort of rot. I had to tell myself I was doing something heroic, to get down to the office this morning. Back of it all there was the growing realization of the awful thing I'd done. It looks as if it's more awful than anything I could ever possibly have imagined. It's difficult to think at all about it, the horror is so great; oh, I pray I am mistaken, I pray I have made a most unjustifiable and abominable accusation. I try to persuade myself I'm mistaken and sometimes I almost do it; but underneath, all the time, I remember the number clearly, clearly.

And I don't see how Mr. Grainge could have entered the amount on two counterfoils, if he had torn out two cheques by mistake. Besides, the ink to-day was fresh.

Yet, if he has lied, deliberately lied, about it.

One can't conceive anybody deliberately lying, unless he's thoroughly degraded. I can't believe Mr. Grainge has deliberately lied. If he were in the wrong, he would not have told Sir Mordaunt of my accusation. Though I hadn't meant it as an accusation.

I was an idiot to think he would be glad to be told of his mistake. Men like Mr. Grainge are above criticism or help. It is for them to dictate to the atoms round them; there must be somebody omnipotent at the head of great concerns. And when an atom in their service, turns round and corrects them, they are righteously indignant.

I said Mr. Grainge would know to-day how I felt to him and the Alliance. As I went down to the office I kept this thought before me; I remembered Mr. Richard's expression when he found how much I cared; I remembered how he had welcomed my comradeship, and I pictured Mr. Grainge welcoming me in the same way.

Everything was just as usual first thing; the

girls chatted away, I chatted too, and underneath, all the time, my heart was thumping as I waited, waited for Mr. Grainge's bell.

He looked the better for his week end, he leaned back with his genial twinkle; it seemed to me he spoke already as to a young colleague, not a clerk.

"Well, did you get them off?"

There was no doubt in his voice, he already smiled approvingly. I found I didn't know how to put it when he eyed me—the stupid colour started rising and burning—I heard myself panting. Mr. Grainge's expression slowly changed. He spoke sharply. There was nothing to say, after all, but that I hadn't done the letters because his cheque had been found.

"Cheque?" said he.

I explained about the waste-paper basket and the cleaner.

Mr. Grainge still stared at me as if asking what that had to do with the letters to the Scottish press.

I found myself saying that they couldn't go with a misstatement, and as he had mentioned the cheque twice and the letter was in a way founded on the fact that his own cheque had been destroyed by the Suffragettes, I didn't see how I could rewrite the letter, convincingly. As I heard myself mentioning the possibility of my rewriting Mr. Grainge's letter, the impertinence of such an idea dawned on me.

Mr. Grainge looked at me as if I were an imbecile. He did not appear to hear what I was saying about the misstatement. The only thing he could take in, at the moment, was my insolence.

"I may be very dense but I really don't know what you're talking about," said he. "I gather you did not feel competent to rewrite my letter, but I can't remember having asked you to put yourself to that trouble. It really had not occurred to me."

"But the letter was no use after the cheque had been found," said I. Sir Mordaunt's contempt is nothing, nothing, compared to the way Mr. Grainge spoke. He rubbed my face in my insignificance.

"Do you know, I must be very stupid this morning, but I haven't grasped what cheque you're speaking of," said Mr. Grange.

I explained again, stumbling this time.

"Are you talking of the blank cheque I tore out with the other, by mistake," said Mr. Grainge. If he did not tear it out by mistake with the other, he is diabolically clever, for he said it pat, without stopping a second to think or looking confused.

Just stared at me incredulously.

If I have made a mistake, its enormity is beyond comprehension. But there was the number.

"But you showed me the cheque-book, sir, don't you remember?" said I; "when I had to telephone to the Bank about the number."

"It wouldn't be the first time two counterfoils have stuck together," said Mr. Grainge coldly.

I could have sworn I had looked at the last counterfoil when I took the number.

"And I understand you have not typed the letters," said Mr. Grainge, "in spite of my urgent order. I think you had better go and do them now, Miss Blunt. Please send Miss Patten to me."

I went out like a crushed worm.

I was ready to believe I had been mistaken then. I had done for myself. Mr. Grainge had entrusted my first big job to me, and I had gone down to Hurley and betrayed his trust. For if I had not wanted so desperately to go to Hurley, I should have typed all the letters even if I had held them back till Mr. Grainge returned.

I hadn't been in my room long before Miss Patten came back and said Mr. Grainge wanted the letters I had done. I took them in. Mr. Grainge had his chequebook in his hand.

"You are right, Miss Blunt, I did tear out two cheques," said he bitingly; "if you will look, you will see the counterfoil; I had entered 'Defaced' on the counterfoil of the cheque you have in your possession." He held out the open cheque-book, keeping it in his hand. I could swear the counterfoil had only just been written on and it was the number after the one I had telephoned to the Bank.

"So I think the letters now may go," said Mr. Grainge, not genially but as though I wasn't worth correcting. He was on a pinnacle from which he could hardly see me without straining his eyes. I stood there like a fool. I couldn't get over the suspicion that he had just torn out a cheque and filled in the counterfoil. In which case my belief in everything that was sacred to me had toppled down.

"And I think an apology would not be out of place," said Mr. Grainge, beginning to write. "It is a new experience to be accused of forgetfulness by a clerk, and one that I do not wish to have repeated."

He wrote on, as he waited.

I tried to say something, but the number danced before me.

At last I spoke.

"That wasn't the number I telephoned," said I.

I don't know why I was such an idiot, but it was the truth. I never forget a thing like that.

Mr. Grainge continued writing, but his face slowly purpled.

"Am I to understand you accuse me of lying?" said he.

I couldn't speak.

I had no chance with him.

I hadn't meant to accuse him, but it was the truth.

Oh, I hadn't meant to accuse him. That Sir Mordaunt should have come in just then, feeling as he does, to Mr. Grainge!

The big door swings so noiselessly and the carpet is so thick, we had not heard him come, and his voice came out of nowhere.

"Good morning," said he, and there he was standing by the door; he moved quietly to the desk, not noticing me, as usual.

"That will do, Miss Blunt, you will go on with the letters," said Mr. Grainge. "These?" said Sir Mordaunt. He took up one from the pile on Mr. Grainge's desk.

I heard Mr. Grainge saying, "Oh, ah, yes, I thought it best to send out the facts of the position," as I went through the door.

When I got upstairs again, I found Miss Beckles with a "special," at once jubilant and angry. The accident to the Northern Mail was now proved to be the work of thieves, and the mail-bags were almost certainly stolen. The police were on the track of the criminals and disclosures were expected hourly. The Suffragettes had died out of the question, altogether. But no one apologized for the accusation; no one even refuted it. It remained to swell the general vague indignation even though it had been proved untrue.

Still Mr. Grainge's letter was now hopelessly out-dated. I was not surprised when a message came for me again.

As I expected, he had decided it was too late now to send out this appeal. From the curt way in which he told me, I knew Sir Mordaunt had put his foot down. But our little business wasn't yet cleared up.

"Sir Mordaunt is inclined to take a more serious view of your behaviour than myself," said he. "He felt instant dismissal necessary. But I hear now that there is a chance of the mail-bags turning up, in which case the cheque we were expecting by that mail will be forthcoming, and the charge of sending out an appeal based on hypothetical statements will be repudiated. I particularly do not wish you to leave just now. I think you will see this is only fair."

My eye fell on that pitifully out-of-date Appeal. I saw Sir Mordaunt reading it; I heard his comments. Not till then did I dream the mysterious Scottish contributor whose notes had been held up in the missing mail-bags, might be questioned too.

I can't see how Sir Mordaunt could take the matter more seriously than Mr. Grainge; his manner showed he was furious with me. I could have cut myself up into little bits; I could have thrown myself on the ground and begged him to trample over me; I could have done anything desperate like that. Only that sort of thing does no one any good. What I could not do, was look Mr. Grainge in the eyes and make a simple statement to the effect that I could see now I had made a mistake, and was sorry.

I know it's possible that I may be proved wrong, but I can't be sure. And till I'm sure, my apology is valueless to Mr. Grainge. But what it will be like, working with him after this, passes thought. I can't think what Mr. Richard will say. I don't dare to.

Every moment is weighted with fear and horror as if something is clutching and stifling me.

I am to leave the Alliance when I have apologized. I can't expect Mr. Grainge and Sir Mordaunt to forgive me if I'm wrong. If the mail-bags turn up and the Scottish notes aren't in them,—well, I've done with fairy-tales about being of use to the Alliance and being rewarded. That interview this morning showed me my place.

I have criticized my superiors; and I'm to be squashed flat. I only hope Mr. Grainge will be right, and I, wrong. I'd rather leave, knowing I deserved punishment, with my ideals alive.

### Tuesday.

Miss Patten's mother is ill, and she has been away to-day.

When the news came, I had a spasm of hope, for Miss Patten is sometimes sent for, to Mr. Richard's room. I should know what he feels about the situation, if I could have two words with him. After lunch Miss Beckles was telephoned for.

I was still busy on those interminable addresses, yet it was a deathblow when Miss Beckles said, "Yes, Mr. Mordaunt," and turned round with, "Bother! That means I shan't get my filing done by tea."

"Why?" said I, trying to appear cool.

"I've got to take the Argentine report in; I bet that means another copy to be made," grumbled Miss Beckles. "One never gets a clear, straightforward day."

I couldn't offer to go though I felt she was making it easy for me. But there was a suspicion of artificiality in the way she lingered pretending not to see the report which she'd just placed under a piece of blotting-paper. I would not ask if I might go.

I'm almost sure Miss Beckles and Miss Patten suspect something; they are certain to have made up some romance because I took Mr. Richard's letters. They think it's the usual silly business of getting a look or smile from a good-looking young man. No. I couldn't fall into her little trap. But how I pined to go.

"Look here, I must get off early to-day; I'm on a committee for the Pilgrims' March," said Miss Beckles with sudden, natural selfishness. "Do you mind running in with this, there's a dear? It isn't as if it's anything Mr. Richard wants to ask about."

I have strength of mind up to a certain point, and then it evaporates. Something warned me that it was unwise to go, but something else pushed me over the line.

"This it?" said I, and marched out with my face like a turkey-cock's, confirming any suspicions she's ever had.

I was nicely paid out.

I walked straight into Mr. Grainge and Sir Mordaunt, holding a consultation at Mr. Richard's desk. I pulled up instinctively, and showed what I was feeling. I saw Mr. Richard bend his head down, purple. It was like facing fire to cross that room, for Sir Mordaunt glanced at Mr. Richard and then at me. It was the wrong report.

"I particularly asked for Miss Beckles," said Mr. Grainge snappily. "Isn't she there?"

"She asked me to come because she was finishing something," I faltered. It sounded such an excuse. Mr. Richard was trying to bury his blushes in the waste-paper basket.

I made my escape knowing my idiocy had got

us into trouble all round. How angry Mr. Richard looked!

Miss Beckles came back, furious, and asked what was the matter with them?

"Think they can treat us like dogs," she stormed. "I wonder you can stand being spoken to in the way men speak to us. Sometimes I'm sorry I left the only ones who've the courage to stand up to them. Let men have a bit of the dirt they make us eat."

I couldn't argue; I agreed with her.

"Christabel's the only person who can give them what they deserve," said Miss Beckles, tapping out her sentences until I thought the typewriter would break. "A mass of pride and power and tyranny, that's what the City is, and we're fools to do their dirty work so that they can roll off in their motors to their kept women. That's what their wives and daughters are—slaves to indulge their appetites. But when they work us as well, and get their pleasure out of what's left of us, overtime; well then you'd think even we slaves would wake up."

"I can't imagine Mr. Grainge or Sir Mordaunt stooping to be civil to their clerks, let alone be friendly," said I, hot again. "They're not young enough," said Miss Beckles. I turned shaky.

"It's these young lords of creation that think they have the run of the slaves that wait on them," said Miss Beckles never ceasing typing. "And if they're young enough, they'll kid themselves and the girl that they're doing a precious, generous action. A few flowers and days in the country and lunches at swell restaurants, is a lot to pay for a clerk. If you knew what I know, you'd turn sick at the sight of a man."

"If a girl accepts that sort of thing, she knows what she's in for," said I; "and what that is, depends on the man. It's the place of men to give things to women."

"Give!" cried Miss Beckles. "Money's an easy thing to give; when you've paid money for your fun, you have it and you're free; but women pay with something that don't leave them free. I shouldn't have a word to say about anything that happened between men and women who started fair and equal. Nor if women could get the pleasant things of life by their own work."

"Thousands of men are as poor and hard-worked as we," said I.

"Oh well, if you're content to lick the dust, you

must," said Miss Beckles and snapped her "A" clean off its stick.

I hate the way she talks, but her words sting. It was awful to be spoken to before Mr. Richard; how can he respect me when he sees me chivied about like trash?

He gives me flowers and takes me out because he honours me. He isn't bribing me or paying for me.

Some men might look at things that way, but not Mr. Richard.

All men are not alike.

### CHAPTER XII

#### THE MERRYMAN AND HIS MAID

Wednesday, May 19th.

In the midst of trouble, life goes on offering enjoyment. I don't think rifts of sunshine do make storm-clouds worse. All through this dreadful day I've felt cheered by last night. After one has had a douche of pleasure, the edge of one's wretchedness seems taken off, somehow. Things are as black as ever they were, and when I think of Mr. Richard, I nearly go mad, but that's just why last night was such a Godsend. It's something to hold on to; all I have at present that isn't terrible to think about. The office is like the condemned cell.

It was good of Jack Ford to forgive me when I'd turned him out of my room, ill and tired, to his cold, smoky fireplace. He is odd. He really doesn't seem to have any of the finer feelings at all. A gentleman couldn't have behaved as if nothing

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had happened; but there is a strain of obtuseness —a matter-of-fact, thick-skinned insensitiveness. If he were in need of a pin, he would ask his dearest enemy for one without the least sense of proper pride. After I had snubbed him as I did, how he could have knocked at my door and asked me to help him get into his costume! Of course, it's a relief, in one way, to know anyone like that. Sensitive people are always being hurt when one hasn't the least intention of hurting them; but Jack Ford begins fresh every time he meets his friends, and doesn't even forgive them. I could hardly believe that he didn't know he was being magnanimous, but I do verily think his only idea was to get into that dress, and he had no feeling at all about me.

I would have welcomed anyone after the day at the office; Mr. Richard hasn't answered my letter yet, and I never see him, and Mr. Grainge speaks to me as if I were a beaten dog, which is what I feel like. Miss Beckles and Miss Patten have guessed something is up and they sympathize with me, quietly— No, I won't begin to think of it. I'm going to hold onto last night.

I've got to economize with a vengeance, for there's nothing in the Bank now to fall back on; I was having an orange for supper when Jack Ford tapped.

Of course I thought it was Mr. Richard, and nearly choked, and threw my untouched half away. I was annoyed when it was only Jack Ford in scarlet tights and shirt sleeves, looking like something in a pantomime.

He put his head in, confidentially, speaking rather more ingratiatingly than usual, but otherwise as calm and genial as ever. He had been lent a fancy dress into which he could not get. He had just managed the tights but the coat was an impossibility unless someone held it. Should I mind coming in for a minute?

The coat was an impossibility, tug and pull and push as both of us might. Jack Ford finally sat down breathless. How he had got into the tights I could not think, until he explained the owner had stuffed them shockingly.

He was determined to get into the coat, however, as he would not be admitted to the ball, without a costume. So we tried anew. Jack Ford hurled himself into it this time, and the coat cracked down the back, clear to the waist; but his arms were in. By dint of struggling a little more, he considered he had got it on; meet at the front, of course it wouldn't.

He is nothing if not inventive. After examining his back in the glass, he had the inspiration to tatter the coat till it was comfortable, and gave me a knife to rip the sleeves till they didn't pinch and slit the coat beneath his arms, till he was bursting out everywhere, as through a trellis-work. He was awfully pleased with the effect, and said it was a much more natural costume for a Merryman. I wondered what the owner would say, but Jack Ford considered he had improved it. As he said, a fancy-dress is fancy-dress.

He was so absurdly radiant and satisfied, and the remains of the coat were so absurdly inadequate, and his tights were so absurdly tight that I suddenly went off into wild peals of laughter. He looked amiably sheepish, and that made me laugh more.

"Why, what's the matter? anything wrong?" said he. "I daren't twist round much more."

I told him he could see quite enough to laugh at if he looked straight before him, and then I dried my eyes, and said I felt more like crying than laughing, and wasn't in the mood for such things and I hoped he'd enjoy himself.

"But I say, look here," said he. "Why not rig up something for you? my ticket says I can bring a lady. It's inclusive, supper and all. If you're not in the mood, it's just then you ought to go to such affairs. Shake you out of yourself! I have it, Peter's sure to have something. He's got a chest of costumes. Come on. His studio is in Kensington, close to the Hall."

"I-go to a ball?" I gasped.

"It'll do us both a world of good," said Jack Ford, sitting down and leaning forward with his hands on his knees in a goblinish, and yet fatherly way. "I'm not a bit up to the mark myself, and I can tell you, I had to make the effort of a Hercules to get into this costume."

This was so true that I began to laugh again, foolishly and helplessly.

He grinned to see me laugh.

"You're much more in the mood than I," said he.
"Do come; I hate going to a thing like this alone.
One feels such a fool. You know; the first plunge, when you get inside! I was racking my brains to think of a lady. Rum I never thought of you. But then I suppose I never think of you as a lady."

"I can't go without a dress or proper slippers," said I.

"Rot. Come as my Maid; the Merryman and his maid, then you ought to wear street shoes. The mud will be rather natural. Come along, it's getting on, and I shall soon be hungry. I know Peter will lend us something."

I can't think to this minute how I accepted. Somehow, Jack Ford hurried me into it before I could think; he didn't let me go back for a hat; he said it was a lovely night, and it wouldn't be etiquette to go to a ball in a hat.

It was strange to be going out so late. Battersea was going to bed already; in the quiet streets the bedroom windows were lit up. I should have been going to bed now, most nights. And here I was, starting the evening, out-of-doors with no hat on, and hurrying to find a dress.

As we ran along we talked of the way people were divided, just the same as animals. Stay-athomes and out-of-beds; all the domestic fowl and beasts going to roost and curling up in dens and stables, and the wild creatures coming out when the others went in, though they came out in the day as well, some of them.

Some people certainly sleep less than others and live much *more*, in consequence. Jack Ford is used to going to all sorts of places, knowing all

sorts of people, and seeing all sorts of sights. As he talked London became an Enchanted City indeed, in whose dark places lurked unimaginable interest and sparkle.

He is so jolly in the way he sees things; there is nothing feverish or unsettling in his adventures: he discovers people doing all sorts of strange work in the time when we domestic small fowl sleep; and is big-hearted enough to be interested. It is glorious to hear him talk about brotherhood; he says we must know what our fellow-beings are doing; ignorance and indifference separate us; we must know about each other before we can like each other, and we must always be ready to enlarge our knowledge. It is difficult to realize that scavengers are our brothers, and feel grateful to them for keeping our homes and cities clean.

The Bird Boy was out. Jack Ford hunted up his caretaker, explained his errand was urgent, and got the key. We went into a gorgeous studio with a balcony and huge window, and Jack Ford turned out a heap of stuffs and rags which he called costumes. He pinned a Chinese mat together for a cap, and made me put on an Eastern shawl wrapped round and round in swathes. I would not take off my blouse, as he wanted. He said I should

be awfully hot, and I was, but still . . . Then he borrowed a white apron from the caretaker and tied it round to make the shawl stay on, and give the costume a peasant look. He enlisted the caretaker finally, and she sewed me into the shawl.

She stood and scratched her head, staring at me when it was done, but Jack Ford was awfully pleased, and said he shouldn't be at all surprised if I bore off a prize. He said there was a touch about it which it was impossible to get in hired costumes. They were all so much the same. From the expression on the caretaker's face, I could see I looked like nothing on earth.

Then we went on to the Ball. Fortunately Jack Ford borrowed another shawl, for a cloak, so I was more or less inconspicuous; he left his overcoat at the Bird Boy's as he discovered an Italian military cloak, which he thought suited his costume better. I tried to persuade him to keep it on altogether, for that little coat looked scarcely decent, and the tights were not dependable, but Jack Ford had taken a tremendous fancy to himself as a Merryman. Besides, as he said, the cloak weighed tons and was most awfully hot, even to walk in. The shawls were pretty thick. Per-

sonally, I think the one I was sewn into, was a sort of carpet. And I had all my things on underneath. Human endurance is really miraculous, when one thinks of what one will go through to get a little pleasure—

When we arrived, we had to say what we were; so Jack Ford told me to call myself, Escoffian national costume.

But, if I had realized what we were in for-

Motors were driving up and brilliant visions stepping out, and people were walking, and crowds were round the portico, and oh dear, they cheered Jack Ford. He did walk rather bouncingly; he was so awfully pleased with himself. He beamed on the crowd, taking their cheers in the most goodhumoured way, and as we went up the steps, asked if I'd bet him a shilling that he'd have a prize. He should go in for the Mediæval Section.

I said I should enter in the Miscellaneous one.

The costumes that were flashing past—real dance dresses decked out with embroideries and spangles and jewels and flowers, a hundred times more elaborate and fashionable than the most fashionable ball-dresses one sees in shop windows, and every one diaphanous. I dared not look at myself in the cloakroom, but I couldn't help a glimpse

of the queerest packet, exactly like a girl in ordinary dress sewn up in a carpet with a coarse white apron tied round, and a table mat bunched up on her head. And already I was hot.

I partly wanted to blush and partly wanted to howl with laughter when I came on Jack Ford, waiting outside, still beaming. The coat had entirely parted at the back, and flapped. He had pulled out his shirt in garibaldi style. As we went in, he told me the glasses in the cloakroom had been an inspiration; he only wished he had had one like that to dress by.

Then we came into that huge hall, and oh dear, oh dear—. It was glorious to be there, through any excuse. I couldn't have imagined such dresses and richness and gaiety. The band was playing music that made every bit of one thrill, and instead of waltzing the dancers were hopping and prancing and cavorting. I wanted to laugh and yet it was all so jolly, I felt more like crying with happiness.

We sidled round till we came to a bench. Then I told Jack Ford I should be perfectly happy watching and he must feel quite free to find a partner. I was relieved to hear he couldn't dance. We watched for a bit, and then it turned out we were both thinking the same thing. Jack Ford

said he couldn't see why dancing should be difficult if one did exactly like the couple in front, picked a good pair, and followed them. And I said I felt I could do it; my feet seemed to be going in spite of myself, and there were too many people there, for any one to notice us.

So we tried.

It was more difficult than it looked from outside, because when you were among them all, you couldn't see anything much. But we hopped about and enjoyed it, when we weren't bumped too much. It was awful when we knocked into people.

Jack Ford thought we did perfectly, but I'm not so sure from the looks that were bestowed on us.

Though as Jack Ford said, we had a right to dance as we liked, it wasn't a performance or a competition. Merely pastime.

He got so encouraged with himself, that when a very stirring measure started, he said it made him think of prancing horses, and he had a magnificent idea. I was to watch him and copy every movement, and then people would think we were doing a real dance.

Of course he was getting very excited by now. I was too hot to feel anything much but the heat,

but Jack Ford had set his heart on this idea, and I couldn't back out. So we started prancing until someone spoke to us. A horrid man with a great nose, who said this wasn't the circus.

Even Jack Ford became hushed at this. We strolled off to get cool. As we passed two people who had been staring very hard, Jack Ford said in a loud voice that it was extraordinary to come to a dance where they didn't know the Boliska, but London was so horribly behind the times. This remark revived him. I don't think the people were at all taken in by it, myself, and when we got out into a corridor I told him so.

He said he thought they looked crest-fallen, and he should go up to the bandmaster and ask why the Boliska wasn't on the programme. But I begged him not to. I had to tell him he didn't look the sort of person who would know of more fashionable dances than the people here, and I thought it would be nice to rest a bit now and watch. I was nearly fainting in that carpet.

He was awfully nice when I told him this, and wondered if he could rip the stitches out, but I didn't feel inclined to risk any more ripping. And though he pointed out ladies with much less on than I should have if I took off my blouse in the

cloakroom, I really could not do it. It's all very well to have an evening dress that's cool, but when you are wrapped in a carpet, you cling to a blouse. It connects you with your species.

But now that we had stopped jigging about, I began to feel miserable again. My thoughts swung back to Mr. Richard. It was strange that he had not answered. I know he's angry, but he ought to have written something in reply. The thought of him is eating away, all the time, and through all the laughter and merriment last night, deep down, the pain was waiting to prick again.

Presently Jack Ford asked if I were appreciating his receipt. I told him nothing could make me happy. I was up to my neck in disillusionment.

He sees things in an odd light.

"Oh, but that's awfully unfair," said he.

I opened my eyes.

"It's always unfair to be disappointed when you're disillusionized," he continued in his mellow, drawling voice which never, never becomes ruffled. "It's your own fault if you have illusions, isn't it? There's no sense in being unhappy if you lose them. Whenever I'm disappointed at being disillusionized, I sit down and give myself a good drubbing. The badness in people is only a temporary thing

like measles. It doesn't belong to their system, and they want to be free of the beastly business as much as anyone."

"Yes, but when they're satisfied with themselves; when they think they are right?" said I.

"Well, you can hardly blame them if they think they are right, can you?" said Jack Ford.

"But you can be disillusionized," said I as bitterly as I felt. "Supposing you'd looked up to some people as heroes, and then found they were tricksters, or one of them was; at least, there was every proof that he was; and then, the one person you relied on, took his part, and tried to cover up the trick, by suggesting more tricks." That was all Mr. Richard's suggestions had amounted to.

"Well, that's where the test of life comes in," said Jack Ford. "We've got to stick to our principles, otherwise, what we think right, but it's impossible to blame other people for doing the same, and it's idiotic to blame anyone, anyway. Leave 'em alone, and they'll come home."

"I like that, when you go and fight with the Suffragettes," said I scornfully. "Why don't you leave them alone?"

"I did," said Jack Ford. "That's the trouble. I'm as miserable as you, at least I ought to be. In

fact I ought to be much more so. You feel you were right; but I feel I was wrong. I ought to be kicking myself every blessed minute; instead of winning all hearts by my grace in the Boliska. I ought to be remorseful; I am remorseful; there's a certain satisfaction in blaming other people but there's none in blaming oneself."

"I don't agree with you. I'd far rather blame myself," said I.

"Well, do it then, blame yourself for being unmerciful," said Jack Ford ingratiatingly. "And blame yourself for spoiling my evening when I need cheering up, and I've brought you to such a beautiful ball."

"I'm serious," said I.

"All right, I'll take a hand at blaming you," said he. "You're a self-centred, over-emotional, ungrateful, expecting, unmerciful little baggage, about whom I am being disillusioned in chunks."

"Oh, how unfair," I gasped. "When you don't know anything about me."

"Exactly," said Jack Ford in mellow triumph.
"None of us ever know anything about the people we're disillusioned about. We just sit and judge them from the little snaps and peeps we get of

them. I bet the people you're disillusioned about, are disillusioned about you."

They certainly were. I couldn't deny that.

"Unjustly, you would say," continued Jack Ford.

I wanted to cry.

"And you're pitying yourself immensely," said he, possessed of a dissecting devil.

I winked back the tears.

"Which is the only certain proof that anyone can have of being utterly and unforgivably in the wrong," said Jack Ford, who was looking away from me all the time, and talking on like a gramophone. "Directly you find yourself snivelling and feeling how right you are and how unjust and wrong other people are, and how lonely and misunderstood and generally, the Chosen of the Almighty you are, kick yourself and kick hard. You deserve it."

"I don't see it at all," I managed to say. I didn't want to cry now. I should have liked to box his ears.

"You know nothing of the circumstances," said I. "I am used to being lonely and don't expect anything else. And as for being misunderstood, I happen to have ideals and I stand up for them,

and of course people who haven't the same ideals misunderstand me, and find it inconvenient to have me near them."

"That's worse than feeling yourself misunderstood," said Jack Ford solemnly, as if he were a physician diagnosing a case. The cheek of it! "When you feel you have ideals and live up to them and are misunderstood because the people you're with can't live up to you, take yourself gently by the scruff of the neck and drop yourself into boiling oil for a minute or two, until you've sizzled some of that feeling out of you. It's the only certain cure."

"I must put up with being called a prig," said I, "and self-righteous." I knew I had been right about that letter; I knew Mr. Richard and Mr. Grainge had been wrong. Jack Ford's easy-going philosophy wasn't going to shake me. But it was very uncomfortable to listen to.

"I'm not calling you one, at all events," said Jack Ford, seeing he had gone too far; "I was merely giving you the results of a long life of rich experience which may be of use to you in the far future. In the near future, what about supper?"

I began to weaken or melt or something. He was such an absurd spectacle.

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"Well, don't preach; I am really in a serious hole and awfully unhappy and what you say doesn't apply to me, honestly," said I.

"I have given that advice to millions of people in my time," said Jack Ford thoughtfully. "And it has never yet applied to one of the people I've given it to. Odd, isn't it? Yet it's awfully good advice."

"Well, I'm not so wretched as I was," said I.
"I know I ought to bear it more bravely."

Jack Ford shook his silly head.

"I could talk for an hour on the frightful dangers of bearing things bravely," said he. "It has such a swelling effect. I can see people swell under it. It either swells them or dwindles 'em. Some it carks, some it—"

I jumped up. I had had enough of that sort of stuff. What business was it of his, to preach at me?

"What about this supper?" said I.

"The first sensible remark either of us has made in the last half-hour," said Jack Ford.

I can't imagine any position in which he wouldn't be perfectly natural and make one feel at home. With the sort of man that Mr. Richard is, one is always in difficult situations. Jack Ford is like a shaggy pony that can be depended on to the crack of doom; Mr. Richard is like a fiery, nervous race-horse, magnificently swift and priceless but oh, a touch may send him swerving from you, a breath may hurt him. Glorious as he is, one's heart is in one's mouth all the time. I am disillusioned in one way, but in another, he is just as splendid as ever he was, and I am just as far away.

A very practical issue presented itself in the supper-room. Everything to drink was charged for. And they had no cold water, only patent water in bottles. Neither of us had any money. Jack Ford was of course pocketless, and I had never thought about it. He said it would be all right; he would find some liquid food, and came in triumph with a plate of pâtés, which were creamy and delicious; only when we'd eaten them, we found they were thickly seasoned with cayenne. Jack Ford said his tongue was swelling, and would be hanging out of his mouth soon.

He really is inventive. Suddenly he told me to follow him, in a very mysterious voice, and led me through corridors to the door of the gentlemen's cloakroom. In here he disappeared, to emerge with a tumbler of tepid water. He had rushed in and said a lady outside was faint. We shared it thankfully, as well as we could for laughing.

And then he suggested going back and dancing. As we returned we came bang up against a glass. I had been watching the two extraordinary figures moving towards us, without realizing. I gripped Jack Ford's arm and told him to stand still and take in what we looked like.

Then I asked if he dared go back to the ball-room.

Jack Ford said our costumes were miracles of ingenuity, but I could see he was shaken. In a minute or two, he wondered what time it was.

I asked why he wouldn't admit we looked scarecrows.

He insisted then on returning to the ball room. But I could see he wasn't as pleased with himself as he had been.

As we came in, we found the floor much emptier. I begged him not to dance again, but he tugged me in, and we banged up against a couple. I pulled him out. The girl was Carol.

Jack Ford recognized her too. We stood and watched her whirl away. Her dress was supposed to be Eastern, I think. She wore a thin chemise, over a curious swathed garment, gold chiffon wound round and round her. A wisp of gold veiling hung from below her eyes, and swished about

as she danced. I couldn't have believed anyone could have dared to come out like that. The wisp of veil and silken shift were such pretences at clothes. She hadn't any jewels, except on her fingers and toes which were covered with sparkles. Yes, toes, for she wore sandals from which the golden stockings were cut away. Her hair hung in two thick plaits braided with gold. To-night her lips were palest pink, and her face was delicately white, like ivory.

"I suppose I ought to thank her for my ticket," said Jack Ford.

Carol was very much engaged with the man she was dancing with. She didn't look in our direction.

"If you want to stay and dance with her, I can go home all right; I've got to be up early," said I.

The sight of Carol made me more ashamed of my idiotic get-up.

"Oh no, I couldn't dance with anyone like that," said Jack Ford hastily. "But I think she'll expect me to speak to her. I'll wait till this dance is ended."

She was coming our way again, looking up into her partner's eyes with her childish appealing gaze. Jack Ford suddenly set back his shoulders. "No, I don't think I will," said he, and marshalled me round. We went out, running. I knew how he felt. If I had seen Mr. Richard, I would have dashed myself through the window or over the stair, anywhere rather than be recognized in that ridiculous get-up. For that matter, I didn't want Carol to see me.

We came out into the night air with the sensation of having escaped disaster but we were not free yet. As we got outside the porch, Jack Ford remembered his cloak and my shawl. I couldn't go back again. The most foolish fear of meeting Mr. Richard had surged up in me. All I would do was to wait against the wall with the chauffeurs and footmen till Jack Ford returned. The hall seemed like a trap.

Jack Ford was a long time away. The cars rolled up and picked up their fragile, pretty loads and whirled them past me, and I looked into one luxurious brougham after another, filled with the diaphanous creatures I had watched all evening. They had been displayed and admired and now they were carefully packed up and sent back to their soft nests.

And then a particularly smart and noiseless car drew up and Carol fluttered into it, attended by a hard-faced bediamonded woman whom I suppose was Mrs. Grainge. She had all Carol's self-possession and conquering air, only she wasn't attractive with it. I got back against the wall, as far as I could. The car had to pass me. Carol was leaning back, a faint smile playing about her lips, and her eyes large and melting as if she were still talking to someone in imagination. Mrs. Grainge sat back with a tired, disagreeable look, and as they passed I saw her rap out something sharp to Carol who had evidently annoyed her about something. I just caught sight of Carol's delicate eyebrows lifting and her smile fading. Then they vanished into the road.

I preferred to be myself, herding with the serving-men but free and out in the open air. When Jack Ford came up, I caught hold of his arm, and it was my turn now to hurry him along. I longed to get out of the noise and whirl into big spaces where I could cry out my pain till it was eased; it was packed up in me now, churning and tearing me about.

When I said I didn't want to go in just yet, he seemed to understand, and hurried with me, atoms that we were, like prowling, furtive cats slinking past dark areas unwanted and unnoticed. I had

never realized where I stood, beside the women Mr. Richard was used to.

When we got onto the Embankment we leaned over the parapet, and the dark waters moved by in a sombre mass and the buildings rose up in dark formless blocks against the sky, and I felt blotted out like them, part of the great gloomy shadowcity. We hadn't said a single word, but he was something to hang on to. Something to cry out to, when the pain grew too much to bear. He hadn't appointments waiting; he could stay as long as I wanted to.

All the time I kept seeing that delicate, pale face with the satin-soft lips, the eyes that could look dewy or mischievous or mocking just as she pleased, the slim form rippling like flowing water under the stuffs that scarcely covered it, the preciousness of the tiny hands and feet.

And there were hundreds like her, soft and tender and delicate, perfumed and tinted and tended till no flaw could be found, sheathed in the finest fabrics that mankind could make. These beautiful girls looked healthy, as if they could play games and were used to the open air. They looked happy too, as if they enjoyed the good time they lived to have. And the money that girls such as

Miss Beckles and Miss Patten and I worked all day to bring into the coffers of the Alliance went very largely to support girls like Carol and convert her into the superfine treasure she was. And I worked all day for Mr. Richard, and caught glimpses of him in unfrequent moments though we loved each other; and the rest of his free time he spent in the world which these girls filled and made amusing. When Miss Patten made eyes at a man, she looked cheap and silly; when Carol glanced at Mr. Richard in the same sort of way, she looked intoxicating. What did she call herself? Heady. And the profits from the work we contributed to, went to make her heady and keep her heady for the men we worked with.

The air grew fresher and fresher and a little chill wind moaned somewhere, but I had to have it out with myself in the open. The great rushing waters told me it didn't matter, there was something greater than Carol. But oh, she seemed so impregnable and I so rubbishy and helpless.

Jack Ford is a wonderful friend. When he asked if I were cold, I said I couldn't go in yet, and he didn't object, only offered part of his cloak. I was so miserable I had to have some comfort and I burst out with the wish that nobody was fasci-

nating. He asked why and I said because they were so difficult to keep. He said fascinating people could only be taken away from you because they didn't really belong to you, and they were surely caught and kept by people who did belong to them; that is, who weren't fascinated by them, but could tell them the truth. He added, in a voice that was meant to be kind, "Like you and me."

"We're not fascinating," said I.

"Not to each other, but with some people, my word!" said he. "You don't know what a relief it is to know you. I feel I can say anything I like without making the slightest effect. So few women understand you mean nothing, that is, nothing they expect you to mean."

"I don't fascinate people," said I. "I wish I did."

I wasn't in the mood for concealing anything.

"Ah, that coldness would be very fascinating to some people," said he. "I'm so infernally lazy, that I must say I like a woman to do it all with me, and expect nothing for it, but some men like trouble. For a man who wanted hard labour, I should say you would be a little gold mine."

"Do you call me hard?" said I. And then somehow it all came out in a flood.

Some women did it all, and had it all to do it with; all the beauty and ease and comfort and charm and delicacy and daintiness that win men's love; and some women, millions of them, had to slave all day and live up to their highest every minute to produce the wealth that gave the soft women everything that made life worth living. Then we were compared with the women that did nothing, and called hard. I was crying like an idiot at the end and gripping on to Jack Ford for all I was worth. I had to be comforted. He didn't soothe me. He flung a great stirring truth to me, and I caught hold of it and my self-respect stood up again.

He didn't say, "Poor little girl"; but "You little fool."

Then he said: "You're on the fighting line and you're getting the full force of the charge just now, Minette, but those of you who are out, can fight, and you know what it is you're fighting and you're getting used to it, and wiser, and less easily rushed every day you come into action. The women you talk of are shut up in a fort that's undermined; and women like Carol know it's undermined and they're drugging themselves and dancing themselves into oblivion of the fact, but every day

they find it harder to do so, and the fear grows stronger. They're afraid because every day of the life they lead makes them softer and weaker and the idea of being thrown out into the din and noise and discomfort and dangers of the firing line makes them scramble like wild cats for the stuff that means life to them-men with money. There never was a time in the whole world's history where the kept women are fighting to be kept, as they are to-day. They come out half-stripped; they stop at nothing to excite the men they want; they're flinging every restraint behind them; it's a scramble that's getting fiercer and more brazen and more shameless because it's a scramble in a losing game. We can't afford them, and the world is waking up to the fact, and they've got to be pitch-forked out of their rotten, hot-pressed nests and made to toe the line. The fort is built of out-worn ideals that are straining and creaking at every ricketty joint; the walls are shaking and quivering when they're touched, and the floor rocks beneath them, whether the women call themselves wives or mothers or ladies. It's the feeling you have in an earthquake when everything that was solid begins to move, and you feel there's only thin air between you and a bottomless abyss. That's where the soft women

are getting to; and that's why I've got my hand held out to Carol, and please God I'll pull her out."

"Do you mean you wouldn't have her just as attractive and well-kept as she is?" said I.

"Oh, Minette, sometimes I see the rottenness of it all," said Jack Ford in a sort of groan. "Those women are going to be known for what they are, they've got to be stripped naked, the lies and the lures and poodles' tricks have got to be seen. They've souls somewhere as much as you or me, and we've got to be patient till something besides lust looks out of them. Trouble is we're only human ourselves and when we want to help, we're so often caught, and they know we're not honest and like the stuff they're offering us although in a way we know its rottenness."

"I don't see why you shouldn't like it," said I.

"Beauty is something worth having. Love is something worth having. Here I am with you, alone, wrapped up in your cloak close by you, and I might be a block of wood. There's nothing in me to make any man like me, as you do Carol. I'm something you respect and want true things from, and I want the other things—the things that make women happy."

"They don't make women happy in the long run," said Jack Ford staring across the river.

"They do and I want them," said I. "I want to be cared for when I'm not there, I want to be cared for so that men will do things for me."

All the nights when Mr. Richard could have come to see me, and didn't come; all the week ends he spent with other people, were rising up.

"Do you know why I came back from that miserable fight?" said Jack Ford; and for all my wretchedness, a pang of sheer wonder shot through. "I broke my word, I failed in what I'd promised, I went back on them and myself and the whole business of shoving on peace and happiness and justice for the world, just because I was thinking of you and wanting to keep in touch. I daren't be shut up and leave you on the fighting line, and I was nicely paid out. You'd have liked to have cut me up in little bits that night, wouldn't you, because you were expecting someone else. Instead of helping to open the way for thousands like you, I didn't do anything for you but look a fool to you. You're sobbing your heart out now for another man and you're angry because I don't give you a soothing syrup, pet, and flatter you. You'll never get that from me. I know what Carol's after and so does she, and sometimes I help her and sometimes I don't. But you have set up to be out after something else; you've set up to be honest. After to-night, it'll be so much harder to believe women are ever going to climb out. Before to-night you made it easier for me to think so."

"I don't want anything from you," said I. For all the shame, what he said was wholesome. It was a sharp douche smack in my face but it braced me.

"Beloved neighbour, I know you don't and that's why I don't give it you," said Jack Ford with a great sigh, as if something were conquered. I suppose he was glad I had stopped being silly. But his face looked strange.

"And I don't see why women should be supposed to have all the responsibility for leading you on," said I. It was pleasanter now we were arguing again. Yes, the worst was over, thanks to Jack Ford's plain words.

"You all want something given to you," said Jack Ford. "You've all got to get off wanting to be on the free list; instead of gloating when you're on it, or envying those who are, you've got to see the free list as a big disgrace."

"Eve gave Adam her apple," said I.

"Hit it in once," said Jack Ford. "Gave him a taste of what he didn't need, shouldn't have had, and lost him his job because he tasted. Oh, Minette, you've said it very clear and plain."

"And whenever Carol offers you anything you'd take it," said I bitterly.

"Carol is a fascinating person," said Jack Ford.

"She is partly an angel, partly a seer, and partly a child."

"I know someone like that only he's a man," said I. Mr. Richard isn't as clever as Carol, but he's quite as fascinating.

"My beloved neighbour, I am aware of it," said Jack Ford.

"Some day I'll tell you about him," said I.

"I don't want to know," said Jack Ford. "I never like hearing other people's love affairs; they are always angry when you sympathize, angry afterwards, you know, when they've made it up again."

"I shouldn't come to you for sympathy," said I.

"You won't take my advice," said he.

"Because I don't need any advice," said I.

"Then why do you want to tell me about him?" said Jack Ford.

"Because I like talking about him when I can't be with him," said I. I was perfectly shameless. I wanted to hit Jack Ford. If he is in love with Carol, I am in love with Mr. Richard. Really and truly in love. He shall realize it.

I think he did.

"My beloved neighbour, I am far more perspicacious than you imagine," said he. "Tell me, if you must let off steam or burst. But I know you'll be sorry after. Women always are. And I attach great importance to keeping you for a friend."

"Why?" said I. It was natural to feel cheered by such a remark.

"Because of our geographical position," said Jack Ford. "I've often thought how handy it would be to have a woman near to do little things; you know the sort of things only a woman can do, tying a dress tie, and cooking little dishes when you're ill. Let us agree not to confide in one another. Then we can keep our breaking hearts for the world outside, and be really useful to each other; we will be cheerful friends, eh? Bright spots in each other's lives? Little rays of sunshine!"

He was rotting, but he was so jolly.

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"I'd like to be that, and you are that already," said I.

"No, am I?" said Jack Ford, awfully pleased. It was nice to have someone to go upstairs with.

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### CHAPTER XIII

#### THE COTTAGE IN THE WOOD

May 21st, Friday night.

MR. RICHARD hasn't written. I wired to the office yesterday. I expect he will be angry. But he has no right to torture me like this. To think he is in the same building all the day; to think I have only to go downstairs, turn the handle of a door, and walk in to him; and yet he might as well be at the South Pole. There is no shadow of an excuse that can take me to him. When I am with Mr. Grainge, I can even hear his voice sometimes, through the partition. And yet I can't get to him.

Yesterday I caught sight of his back, as he was going out. I was with the girls. I could have overtaken him if I had run after him, but I dare not do it. Then I had the idea to wire him. I said I must see him that evening. But he didn't come; he hasn't even answered. He is killing me.

If he has done with me for acting as I did, he ought to tell me so. And I have to tell him about the second cheque; I have to tell him so much. If he heard my case now, he could not say I had acted wrongly. It's in a time like this that love is most worth having; if he were suffering and I could go to him—

Sometimes I ask myself if our love has ever been; it has proved so unsubstantial, now a test has come.

I could bear anything at the office if Mr. Richard would forgive me and be himself again.

The more I think of the whole business, the more confused I grow. Sometimes I wonder if I ought to have obeyed Mr. Grainge and Mr. Richard because they are my superior officers; in an army, soldiers must obey, whatever orders are given. But I love the Alliance; it stands for all that is true and noble, and surely it is my business to see that no misstatements go out from this office? If I had thought Mr. Grainge had deliberately torn up that cheque at first, I might have obeyed, but that never occurred to me. I thought he had honestly made a mistake. I sometimes wonder if he had, and if my suspicion is entirely baseless. Oh, if I could only know the

truth. But I can't help remembering the number I telephoned to the Bank. There, I am at it again. I have vowed I will not think of it. I must think of something helpful.

What a friend Jack Ford has been this week! He knows something is up. Well, I told him I was desperate. I had to excuse myself for walking into his room last night, but if I had stayed alone, I should have beaten my head against the wall or something. Doesn't a man realize what a woman feels when she is waiting, waiting—with no word to say if he is coming. He might have wired he couldn't come.

It was half-past ten; I could not stay alone.

Jack Ford is nice. He welcomed me as if I had done nothing unusual in coming. I asked him to leave the door open so that I could hear anyone on the stairs, and he took that as if it were quite ordinary to be expecting callers at that time of night. When I told him I was desperate with being by myself, he said he knew the feeling exactly, and I must always knock him up when I wanted a human voice as he was always ready to talk, night and day. That was his one weak spot.

But when I got there, I found I didn't want to talk.

It was a perfect night; a tiny wind puffed softly in the curtains at the open window, the roar of London sounded far away, sweet spring odours came from a jar of gilliflowers, and the shaded reading-lamp cast a circle of light where he had been writing. The room was full of shadow, and Jack Ford sprawled on the sofa at my service. But I was listening all the time for the stairs to creak.

Jack Ford broke the silence by pulling himself up and beginning to walk up and down, up and down, with his hands behind him. Then he brought himself up on his heels and balanced on them.

"Look here, why should we be unhappy?" said he. "It's such a mug's game. Couldn't we do something about it? We are two sane people, aren't we, with control over our thinking processes? Very well, let's be happy; let's insist on it. Don't let's allow ourselves to be so blue. You stop me, and I'll stop you."

"Are you unhappy?" said I and he nodded.

"It's this beastly weather," said he. "It seems such a waste. When one fine night after another comes along, it makes me hate pavements and rooms, and I want to get away and I hate Battersea. Not that it's only the weather. It's general

all-overishness—nerves. I get the jimjams wondering if I'm ever going to do anything worth while; if I've got it in me; if I'm hopelessly banal and haven't two intelligent ideas in my noddle. Am I worth anything as a man or a writer? Ought I to lead myself to the bridge and say good-bye to the quiet stars, and so forth. You cannot imagine the horror of publishing your first book and getting no reviews."

"Is your book out?" said I.

"Monday, and I haven't heard a word from anyone," said Jack Ford. "If I got some slashing criticisms, that would at least tell me where I stood, but to have nothing—nothing—"

"Oh, I know," said I. "Have you a copy here?"

"Well as a matter-of-fact I don't want you to read it; not this one; you shall see the next if there ever is one," said Jack Ford becoming rather red. "I didn't mean to speak of it. I am an ass."

"It's all right; I shan't think of it again," said I.
"I'm not really very interested."

"No one appears to be. Do for heaven's sake, talk to me of someone else or something or I shall drop myself out of the window."

"I don't want to talk of myself," said I. "You

go on talking to me. Will it be serious if this book doesn't sell?"

"Oh, I never expected it to sell," said Jack Ford.
"It's a little venture of my own, to get known."

I stared at him. Books can't be published without money. I had taken it for granted Jack Ford had nothing, somehow.

He saw what I was thinking.

"Oh, it's not the money, it's only my self-respect," he explained. "You see before you a black sheep, who has left the paths of pleasantness in the bosom of a solidly upholstered family—"

"You don't mean you have a family?" I cried. Of course I had thought of Jack Ford as alone.

"Ship owners, The Durham Fords; eldest son. There's the tragedy," said he. "Too soft-hearted parents to disinherit me, parental welcome waiting directly I leave my husks. Turned my back on the whole blooming lot of them for Literature, and now, am I any good? Does publication in three weeklies and one never-to-be-forgotten monthly constitute a guarantee that I am worth something? Or have I made an immense mistake? Not that I'll ever return to the family bosom. Three hundred a year and freedom is all I want, as far as daily bread's concerned, and Thank God,

I've got that. But is it sheer waste of time shutting myself up here all day to scribble, and had I better save my postage stamps and go abroad and enjoy myself?"

"How can I tell unless I've read your work, although I shouldn't know even then," said I. "The only proof is success."

"Oh, pardon me, that's the perplexing part of it," said Jack Ford. "Look at Stevenson, and the De Goncourts, and stacks and stacks of men. Nearly every one of the leading men to-day have ground the bread of bitterness to ashes for years and years before they suddenly romped home. And then, on the other hand, thousands are left at the post, during this life, anyway."

"My father was," said I.

"Did he write?" said Jack Ford.

"Poetry," said I. "I've got a tin box full of it. He couldn't sell it. I should say it was waste of time myself, to write things unless they sell."

"Now look here, I want cheering," said Jack Ford argumentatively. "You're as bad as my aunt. She's one of those practical women who can't see anything in front of them except results. She says I ought to get out more and push myself, win all hearts by my wit and humour, make myself

pleasant to editors; has offered to give dinnerparties if I'll come out of my shell and have a decent address. But I shouldn't have thought you'd be like that."

"I'm not," said I. "I don't know anything about how people do get on, I only know it's wretched when they don't, and I advise you to chuck it, if you don't get on."

"Well, the last thing I should have expected you to be, is a coward," said Jack Ford.

Even in my misery, he was able to make me furious.

"I shouldn't ever give in, if I knew I was right, but you don't know you are right, or you wouldn't be asking my advice," said I.

"Do you mean to say you always know when you are right?" said he.

"Of course," said I.

"You know what self-righteousness is, don't you?" said Jack Ford, wagging his silly head. "Thinking yourself always right."

"I know I'm right in what I'm doing now and I won't let you shake me," said I; it was a cry of misery. He did shake me, in my foundations. The only comfort I had, was knowing I was right. And sometimes I wasn't sure of even that.

"Beloved Minette, I didn't want to shake you," said Jack Ford. "Here, I've blown off to you and feel better; now you blow off to me."

His voice can be so kind.

I choked back my tears.

"It's no use," said I. "Besides, I don't want anyone to know. It isn't only to do with me. You will say I have no business to expect people to be honourable, and I still differ from you. I ought to expect people to be honourable, and I ought to be disappointed when they're not. And I must go on trying to do what is right, myself. I know it's right to be honourable."

"Yes, and ain't it dashed hard to be it, too," said Jack Ford scratching his head, like an ashamed small boy.

I nodded; I couldn't speak.

I wanted to pour it all out, but I knew it wouldn't be honourable to tell a soul.

"Look here, you give me some advice on quite another subject," said Jack Ford squatting down again. "Supposing a man was partly in love with two women, would it be honourable for him to go on finding more and more about each, getting to know both of them better and better, so that he could make up his mind?"

"I don't see what else anyone sensible could do," said I, startled at the extraordinary turn of the conversation, and not seeing then that the question was only to make me think of something else. Bless him. He is a comfort.

"Yes, but suppose the women began to feel things to the man?" said Jack Ford with his funny, sheepish grin.

"I should just call him a rotter," said I, changing my mind. "If he didn't know his own mind, he couldn't be the sort of man who could care very deeply. When one is really in love, of course one knows."

"But people do fall in love with more than one person," argued Jack Ford, scratching his head ruefully. "I don't see that it's anything against a man to fall in love with two women simultaneously; or rather, to fall out of love with one woman gradually, while he was falling in love with Number Two."

"Oh, I hate the way in which you speak of such things," I flamed. "You haven't any conception of what real love is like. When one loves there isn't anyone else in the world, not at the time nor ever after."

"You admit there can be an afterwards, though," murmured Jack Ford.

"I meant, if the person you love gets tired and leaves you," said I. "But even in that case, never, never could there be anyone else. Not if you'd really loved."

"Well, I don't believe falling in love is ever as neat a job as that with anyone," said Jack Ford, quite calm and even jolly. "It's a mixed up business. One day, one girl seems the ticket, and another day, or evening, you're placed in romantic circumstances with someone else, and you feel, well, after all, this sort of girl is much more worth while, hang it all, what a fool I am to dance round after the other; and the next day, you're dancing after the other again."

I could have hit him; for of course I thought of Carol. But Mr. Richard isn't like that. Although—oh dear—in my heart, I know he is.

"Do you call this cheering for me?" I asked bitterly.

"No, and it was awfully silly of me to ask, because I might have known how conventional women always are when they talk about such things," said Jack Ford philosophically. "Directly you mention love to a girl, whirroo, whirroo, off she

goes to the skies, though she may be doing exactly what you're talking about, herself. There's no honesty in women. I do try and find out the truth about myself, though I admit it's a most muddling process. Of course I get emotions in which I can feel all you feel and more. But, I like to reason with myself in the morning, about eleven-thirty. It was absolute madness to introduce the topic on a night like this. Everyone feels capable of loving anyone for ever on a May evening."

"Well, I didn't introduce it," said I, and then I saw his funny, laughing face, as genial and friendly now as ever, and I began to smile. It was so ridiculous for Jack Ford to be worrying himself about love.

"I wish I were you," said I.

"My dear girl it's a most awful position to be in. I don't enjoy feeling a cad, and sometimes I have an awful suspicion that I am one," said he. "Women feel these things more deeply than men. We have no right to experiment. We ought to warn them more plainly than we do."

Suddenly I began to laugh. To think of Jack Ford feeling it necessary to warn fascinating women like Carol not to fall in love with him. Poor Jack Ford.

"You're a goose," said I. "Don't keep awake over your fatal fascinations. You can be as friendly with a woman as you like, you're not the sort of man who can make women miserable. You make them happy."

"Isn't our idea of love a travesty?" said Jack Ford. "All the same, you are very annoying."

"Nonsense," said I. "Just for this minute, you've made me feel much better. Look here, I want to do something for you. To-morrow afternoon may I fetch all your pans, and clean them really well?"

"I shall be out, I'm afraid," said he.

"Bring them in before you go," said I. "I can't tell you what it will mean to have something I've got to rub at hard. Do let me."

"Of course I will," said Jack Ford. "I was just thinking I should really have to have a woman up. I'll tell you what. I'll leave my door open, and you can turn out my room if you like."

Saturday night.

When I look back—oh, when I look back!
And yet, when I look forward——

Well, I have forgiven Mr. Richard, and he has owned he had nothing to forgive me for.

But—that everything should be settled——

I had given up all hope of seeing him; he had said he would never come to my room again. I was black, not only my hands but there were smuts on my face. My hair was half down. I had on my old blouse. The room was thick with saucepans. And then his message came.

I love the way he summons me to meet him, as if there can be no question of my flying to all ends of the earth, if he commands. Jack Ford's pans were left to their native grime. I was at the Museum actually in the appointed place—the embroidery gallery-on time. It wouldn't have been natural if he had been waiting. I found the Egyptian cases and began to study them, to keep from watching too anxiously. Somehow, I knew Mr. Richard would despise me a little if he found me standing, waiting, anxiously. So I tried to be interested in those wonderful shreds of woven and embroidered stuffs, tried to think back thousands of years to the long hot days when the women sat and worked the waiting hours into stitches. How beautifully they worked then! I was drawn on from case to case, I had never been here before and never realised what needlework could be. Presently I found myself in the German section, or the

English section, the work was mixed up together, but there were embroidered towels and table-cloths and curtains and bedspreads that gave me a craving for a lovely home. For the moment, I too, possessed long days in which there was nothing to do but sew beautiful stitches on beautiful household things. The cases breathed of leisure and calm activity and abundance of all that was good and easeful in the daily round; they made me want to be a housewife and put my whole soul into a home, instead of the shreds and scrimps of time and thought I have to spare after the office day. Something in me seemed to rise up, homesick.

I stood before a bedspread worked with flowers, each different, and every spray a miracle of colour and stitches, and I felt as when I stand upon the river bridges; something cramped inside me stretches out, and I'm released from being ground up in a machine. To think that anyone had had the time to do it. How beautiful life could be if we had endless time in which to live! The calm and ease of embroidered towels! Washing would be a luxurious delight if one dared use soft, fine damask exquisitely fringed with great initials in scarlet cross-stitch and flowers festooned about

them. Meals on embroidered table-linen would have to be leisured. The sight of the small, even stitches would soothe the most hurried diner; I love to think of luxury like that. Only it seems impossible to think of it for oneself.

As I wandered along, I marvelled at the work that women had done. From time immemorial they have brought out the beauty of homely daily acts, and made flowers spring up round the minutiæ of daily living. The necessary daily life becomes so irksome when one is in an office all day. Yet this work hadn't been done by idle people. Through the ages women have worked hard to make homes for their menkind; by unremitting work alone, they've made the shelter from the strain and tedium and ugliness of city offices. London became small as I thought of all the women and the homes that were and ever had been. The traffic, the adding up of figures, the buying and selling ceased to be all-important, looking at this tiny rivulet from the steady flow of centuries. Stealing through the earth and stones and dust, women's work has made flowers bloom everywhere. What a desert life would be if homes were only made and kept by men! Jack Ford's rooms are a good example.

When Mr. Richard touched me on the shoulder, I was hopelessly domestic. The Alliance was a great vulture, plucking me from my natural happiness. It is funny how these instincts waken, and stir, and twist us about. I've despised Miss Patten for caring so much about domestic things, but in my heart, I'm as bad.

The awful thing is, I can understand now women selling themselves for a home to fuss with; I feel as if I've done that myself, in a measure, to-day.

I'm not wholly happy about it, as I ought to be.

Mr. Richard asked what on earth I was looking at; he said my back looked like a child's at a sweetshop. I said that was a bit how I felt. I wanted to break into all the cases and take the lovely things home and copy them. I wanted to fringe towels and knot them and work them, and embroider napkins with flourishing letters, and work curtains in silks all over, and decorate everything I had on. I had a perfect needle madness, and as one person could never do all I wanted to, in a lifetime, I was thirsting for maidens to sit around me, in an afternoon, and be given all the dull parts to do.

Mr. Richard stared down at me as if I were mad, but I felt reckless. The something inside me was clamouring so loudly for a home and a needle and lots of time. It was such a pretty easy way of living. I was tired of struggling with the officewheels and the great power that drove them.

"Well, you always take the wind out of my sails," said Mr. Richard looking down with his puzzled, doubtful frown. "Now, how can I scold you? What have you been doing to yourself to look so pretty and pathetic?"

I'd been eating my heart out for him, but I wasn't going to be silly enough to tell him so. I'm learning how to manage Mr. Richard. I mustn't let him know he matters to me; I hate pretence, but one has to do it.

I said I wanted coloured silks too badly to think of anything else that moment; and tiny dolls' needles. I showed him a bluebell and asked if he thought it possible that human hands had worked it. I said I should like a dress worked from top to bottom, powdered with little flowers.

Mr. Richard said he would carry me off to a cottage in a wood and give me everything I wanted—bluebells and all; he could talk to me now. If I'd only be good, I could have everything I was wanting, and the only condition would be that I must take him with them.

He had never spoken to me quite in that way before. He always avoided the future, but now he was ready to promise things. There was something desperate about him; and I saw in his eyes that I was pleasing and surprising him. I felt surer of him than I have ever done.

"I thought you were going to be angry," said I.

"So did I," said he. "But I thought you were going to be on the high horse, you see, instead of in a work-basket. I never knew you could fit into a work-basket. That's always where a man wants a woman to be if he cares for her. Now I've found you in it, I'm knocked silly and I can't bully you. I want to go and find the biggest and comfiest work-basket of the most extra-special kind and put you into it. Look here, do make me talk sense or I shall kiss you."

I didn't want to talk sense and quarrel and argue; it was heaven to feel him looking at me and loving me again.

So I pretended to be more taken up with the needlework than anything in the whole wide world. And moved on to another case, as if he wasn't there.

<sup>&</sup>quot;I really shall kiss you," said he, behind me.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Nonsense, you've come to bully me because of

the Alliance," said I. "Do for goodness' sake get it over, while I've something interesting to look at. Did ever you see such a darling, darling little cap?"

"It's a baby's cap," said Mr. Richard in a funny voice. "Should you like to make those?"

He must have seen the colour; it was round the back of my neck.

"I mean every word I say," said he. "Will you leave the office and let me find a cottage in a wood?"

Leave the Alliance! I was going to leave, now, anyway. But I thought I was going to leave Mr. Richard too. And now—now—

"Hasn't Sir Mordaunt told you, then?" said I. "My father?" said Mr. Richard.

"I am dismissed," said I. "At least, I am to be dismissed when the mail-bags turn up. Mr. Grainge has demanded an apology. I can't give it him till I know the truth, so I'm to stay till I do know, or Mr. Grainge gets tired of waiting. That's what I wanted to tell you."

"You are going, then," said Mr. Richard. He was relieved. I turned round. There was nothing but a big relief in his voice and face.

"Why do you want me to go?" said I.

I could see Mr. Richard hesitating, to see if he could tell me anything more convenient than the truth; and I could see him decide that truth met the situation better than anything else.

"Grainge suspects," said he. "I told you he was precious sharp. And that fool Benson took in your wire to him; I was out. What possessed you to send it? Of course he doesn't know who Jasmine is, but he'd know you had something urgent to see me about if he was sharp enough to put two and two together, and he certainly is. I knew he suspected something when he put Benson in my room. But now, the cat's out, and the only way to dodge them, is for you to go. Thank goodness, this rumpus gives us a clear lead out."

"But won't your father mind more because of it?" said I.

"He can't possibly suspect you're coming to me," said Mr. Richard. "After this fuss your going will be the most natural thing in the world, and when you're gone, how can they know anything about you? What business is it of anyone's then?"

"But you're mad. Your father will think it his business to know all about the person you're engaged to, if you—we—if we are going to marry and have a cottage in a wood," said I. I couldn't help blushing stupidly, even though Mr. Richard had proposed it.

Mr. Richard went crimson too. For the moment, we couldn't say anything. I felt the glass case cold against my shoulders and found I was leaning against it. Had I mistaken his meaning? For he was silent. Yet how could he have meant anything else? People couldn't joke about such things.

He had meant it; but not as I hoped. I can see his point; it would be impossible for him; but oh, I don't like secrecy.

"I couldn't possibly say anything to him yet," said he. "It's a question of bread and butter. When I'm independent of him, that's a different thing; but he can't know; there'd be the most unholy row if my people guessed we were—friends—"

It was impossible to go on like this, without knowing exactly what he meant. He had asked me to leave the office; he had promised to look after me; we were not friends; it was absurd to talk as if we were. I couldn't let him go away with everything indefinite. It was all very well for him;

he knew what he meant, but I didn't. And at a time like this, I had to know.

"We couldn't have a cottage in the wood if we were friends," said I.

"It would be rather uncomfortable having one if we were enemies," said Mr. Richard quickly, trying to laugh.

"And I wouldn't give up my job; you wouldn't ask anyone to do that unless—Mr. Richard, you mustn't fool with me, what do you mean, are you just fooling?" said I.

For there was something in his look-

He knew I should turn round and walk off and never look at him again if he hadn't said what he did say. He was forced into it. He meant it, of course, but I can't feel he meant to say it; I can't feel he meant to commit himself.

That's why I can't be wholly happy.

But he did say it.

"You know what I feel to you, you maddening little thing," said he. "You know you can trust me. Only we mustn't tell people. It won't be the first time a man has"—he paused a moment, then said the word I had been waiting for—"married—on the quiet."

He always had meant it, of course; that is, he

would have meant it if he had faced the future, but he doesn't like facing things, and he hugs his freedom. I could see it, even at that moment.

If I'd let him go on indefinitely, he would have gone on indefinitely. If he hadn't known I should have walked off, there and then— Well, well, that's why men do marry women, because they can't be sure of them, any other way; and I marry Mr. Richard to be sure of him—but it feels terribly like a bargain and a price. The one who makes the hardest and firmest terms, wins.

Oh, surely marriage ought to be a giving, a coming together because it's a joy to be together, because no one else understands so well; there oughtn't to be any bargaining, or trusting, or mistrusting, no need to speak of such things. I thought there wasn't; perhaps there isn't, with women. But with men—

I have never felt sure of Mr. Richard.

Yet it was much better when we knew where we stood. We could plan things, and it was exciting to think of the future when we should be together for ever. I could see how the idea of a secret marriage and a secret little home appealed to the adventure in him. And after all, nothing matters to me but being with Mr. Richard.

But I would not agree to leave the Alliance at once, as he wished. I had arranged to stay until the mail-bags were found, and if Mr. Grainge were proved right, and somehow he seemed to think he would be justified all round if they were found, I would like to apologize to him. If I left now, it would seem like running away, and proving myself in the wrong, and at the same time, leaving Mr. Grainge under a slur. Mr. Richard said I spoke as if I were Mr. Grainge's employer and were giving him a chance, and it was a ridiculous position to take up. But when I've started such a fuss, it's only fair to see it through, however beastly it is for me. One can't do a thing like that and slip out of the consequences.

We argued the matter behind the cases; it was as if the needlework played a part in it. I had something to look at and cling to. When I couldn't bear it, for his will is like steel, and hurts, and hurts, I went on to another case, till my eyes swam with looking at pattern after pattern. Over and over again, I thought Mr. Richard wouldn't follow, but he moved on with me until we came out in a quiet place at the end where the cases were full of glorious dresses, embroidered as I'd pictured, and there, behind a frock with sprays of

primrose green and daffodils and pearly blue, Mr. Richard caught me to him and kissed me and said I could do anything I liked, he'd have his innings when I belonged to him. Then I should see how much my independence counted for.

"You've got the upper hand at present," said he. "You'd march to the stake for your blessed principles, in the mood you're in at present, but I've never been beaten yet by man, woman, horse, or dog, and I'm not going to give in to a scrap of a girl like you. So now you know what's in store for you, Mrs. Richard."

He could do anything he wanted with me, when he talked like that. But oh, I mustn't let him know it.

London looked different when we came out of that great treasure-place, not so big, friendlier; it couldn't tear Mr. Richard away from me now. We were united at last.

He is going to find a little house near his Hurley cottage, away from the river, really hidden away; and we shall furnish it with the cottage things in the autumn.

I couldn't polish Jack Ford's pans when I got back. I dumped them all inside his door. I have too many things to think of. We are going for a long taxi-spin to-morrow, to the sea.

How different my life is going to be, just full of happiness.

I am an idiot to feel Mr. Richard ought to have been more definite of his own free will; he couldn't know how insecure I felt.

I can't understand him saying he isn't sure of me.

Well, well, all the storm-clouds of the Alliance have turned into nothing; out of them has come the cottage in the wood.

And all the glory of the Alliance—well, well, Mr. Richard will help that to grow more bright, and I can help him.

My Fighting Line don't seem to have as much to do with me, as usual; perhaps, because Mr. Richard's going to do all the fighting now. I shall miss my sky parlour, in a way, and the friends I've made here; I shan't be able to have friends of my own; well, I shan't want to. But shall I satisfy him, shall I keep him, in our cottage in the wood?

## CHAPTER XIV

## THE ATTIC GODDESS

June 6th, Sunday.

IT seems an impossible thing to fit two lives together, that are as different as Mr. Richard's and mine. I can't imagine how it will be done. When people are engaged openly, they give up their other interests more or less, and devote themselves to each other, and so they start interests together; but when people are secretly engaged they can't do that.

My brain whirls to think of Mr. Richard's friends; he has so many, and goes out so much. He has a lot of cousins who are very gay and fashionable; he says society is a big jolly family party and he does love the season and can't possibly hurt people by declining invitations and becoming unsociable.

He thinks nothing of going out to dinner and on to a couple of dances; and keeps this up, night after night. He says if you fall out of things, your place is filled in a minute.

It is wonderful that he can think of me amongst it all. Every Saturday a glorious bunch of roses comes, tucked up in tissue paper. He can't cancel his river invitations and upset his friends' plans, so we haven't managed another Saturday.

But how shall I fit into those plans when-

I can't see myself with Mr. Richard's friends any more than I can see Miss Beckles and Miss Patten with them. He evidently can't, either; but he can't keep me shut up in a cottage in a wood for ever. Suppose it's found out? What will happen? He cares so much for his friends and people, and is so happy in their company.

Miss Beckles asked me yesterday if I was seedy.

Lately, I've wondered if she suspects anything, for she has been peculiarly gentle. She has now joined another variety of Suffragette. It is funny how every Cause splits up. If people could be only loyal to the one purpose, and not have different opinions, and fight about them,—though I'm a nice one to talk.

When I think of the way the Alliance and Mr. Grainge and Mr. Richard used to seem to me—

oh, how happy I was then, much happier then. The only way to get anything accomplished appears to be, to obey slavishly; set up someone as an ideal and follow blindly; there doesn't seem any other practical way. When people begin to question and measure up other people's actions,—I don't believe any human actions square with perfection. And then, naturally, one grows disappointed and doesn't know what to do. Or cuts adrift.

## June 7th, Monday.

The colonizing scheme is to be given up. I have spent the day writing addresses. The curtest intimation has been sent to applicants. Mr. Grainge is a wonderful person. He is heart and soul now in mining plans for British Columbia. He directed me to send out the notice about the abandoned scheme, as carelessly as if he had told me to send out for some stamps. He is not shattered by it. I saw Mr. Richard for a minute on the stairs, and he looked as gay as if nothing had happened, and when I said, "The Scheme's off, then," he said, "What scheme?"

One minute, everyone tugging and fighting, and the next, the rope is slack, and the pullers are running away, light-heartedly. Great schemes come up, don't happen, and sink into nothingness, and here we all are going on as usual, and no one stops to deplore the waste of energy and hope and enthusiasm.

I am beginning to think I am a fool to be enthusiastic about anyone or anything.

No news of the mail-bags. Apparently the business about the cheque has been swept into the limbo of yesterdays. I don't believe anyone will ever speak of it again.

The office seems a dull machine, grinding, grinding, while we pass among the wheels, tiny animalcula, pouring a drop of oil in here, turning a handle there, feeding it with our lives, our tedious, daily lives. Outside, there is a happy sun-filled world where birds sing and people dance and music hums and pulses, and men and women are gay and beautiful like shining birds.

But we office drones are a dull, shabby, dirty lot.

How I hate the Teashop!

I believe I have sacrificed myself unnecessarily. What does Mr. Grainge care for my apology or opinion of him? I was an idiot not to agree to Mr. Richard's proposition when he made it, and give notice then and there. Mr. Richard would

have to have made arrangements then. But it's so hard to get at him now.

June 17th.

Jack Ford came in again to-night. I don't know what I should do if I hadn't him to play to me, and sing, and talk. To-night I was so wretched and he was so kind, I told him I was engaged. I didn't say to whom. I told him it was a tremendous secret.

But he was so calm and far away, I had to impress on him that I was independent of him and had my own little niche, too. It was a relief to tell him. I piled it on about Mr. Richard's manliness; I said "he" was my ideal of everything a man should be, I expatiated on all the splendid qualities that Jack Ford hasn't. When one is wretched, one has to buck oneself up, and there is a sort of savage joy in showing Jack Ford how I despise his unmanliness.

He is so different from Mr. Richard. Manly men don't stay at home so much; they aren't free nearly every evening; they don't cook for themselves, and spend their days writing.

He is so kind to me, and yet so dashed independent, I have to show him I'm as independent as he is.

The only way I could prove that to him, was by telling him about Mr. Richard.

He said he knew; but I don't believe he did.

He also said he wasn't in the least interested. He is the rudest person I have ever met.

Oh, I'm so cross and wretched and alone.

June 30th.

Jack Ford is going to leave.

There will be no one next to me.

I can't picture the house without him.

It is as if I am stretching out my hands to emptiness; the only companion I can talk to, is being torn away. The only person I was sure of, the only person I could cling to.

He hadn't been in since that night when I told him about Mr. Richard. The last two evenings I've been hearing bumping sounds as if he were house-cleaning. To-day there were cases on the landing, and an awful fear took hold of me. I heard him bumping round, and had to know. So I went in to ask if I could help. The room was upside down, books and papers over the floor. He was covered with dust, and said he wasn't in a state to receive callers. I said, "Rot, I'm not a caller," and came in. Jack Ford followed, pretty

sheepish. He knew he ought to have told me before.

His leaving is quite sudden. His book was spoken of very highly at a dinner-party where his Aunt was, and she has now made him an offer of an allowance and the loan of her house in Aubrey Walk, if he will live there and go into society and allow his work and himself to be pushed. She says Campden Hill is essential if one is to be pushed in that sort of way.

My last illusion was smashed, and I sat on a packing case and laughed not very kindly.

He dared to grin, and said, "Immortal Cæsar, dead and turned to clay, stopping up a hole in society to drive dull care away."

How could he laugh, when he had had such noble ideals of turning his back on all that sort of thing!

"Slave of Society business, eh?" said I.

"The idea is to enslave society," said Jack Ford, sheepish but not properly ashamed. "Books can't sell unless they're pushed."

"Ye Gods, are you going to tout for trade like the waiters at Kew?" said I.

"With the world as it is, you must do a bit of this sort of thing; of course, this is only an experiment," said Jack Ford in his confidential voice.
"I shall miss my den frightfully, but everyone is convinced there's nothing for it but a
potshot at the fame business, so I'm going to
try it."

"Well, I thought you were above it, that's all I have to say," said I.

"No one's above doing anything if he wants to do it badly enough," said Jack Ford. "I want most awfully to make a hit. I may only be burning my fingers now. You never believe you're going to be burned till you have been burned, do you? So I say, let's get the burning over as quickly as possible."

I cannot annoy him or shake him.

I looked down on the floor, which hadn't been swept for days.

"Well, I suppose you've got to clear this mess up," said I. "Here, where are you putting these books?"

I picked up the top one of a pile of little blue volumes, all alike, and my eye fell on Jack Ford's name. It was his precious book.

I happened to open at the one place he didn't want me to see. He flew for it, but I had seen.

## TO AN ATTIC GODDESS

Unbroken is the pallor of her brow, Virginal, and untroubled with the dawn Of love's approach; steadfast her passionless eyes Steeled at the contact of love's waking morn.

Her lips are carved with brave imaginings Bidding all men beware, they are so true; But oh, to see the dawn flush through your heart And find the woman that is hid in you.

I might have read it a thousand times, and I should never have dreamed of any personal connection, if he hadn't torn it from me, and given the show away. He got it from me, but the words had printed themselves on my brain like a photograph.

"Any subject inspires a poet, just as any pretty woman inspires a painter," said Jack Ford, and for the first time, I saw him nervous.

As for me, I wanted to gasp or something. I couldn't do anything but stare at him. He had thought such things—Jack Ford—whom of all men I should have trusted—

It didn't seem possible he should have thought such things—

Even for a moment; even long enough to write them.

"Well, now I've seen it, I may as well read your book," said I, trying to appear hardened.

When you read a thing like that, you do see the writer in a different light; I was angry that he had dared to think like that. I had always thought he separated me from Carol and the other women he gave hints about. I'd liked to think we were friends.

"Now look here, you never, never would understand how people come to write poetry about people they don't care a button for," said Jack Ford, without the slightest regard for my feelings. He spoke as if I had none. "If you do read this book, it will mean a lot of rotten self-consciousness and all that sort of thing. Will you give me your word not to read it, even if you get the chance?"

"But why?" said I. "I assure you I shan't imagine anything personal in your blessed love poems. I don't believe in love you can write about and distribute to every woman you've ever set eyes on."

"Ah, but it's upsetting," said Jack Ford, colouring a little. "You wouldn't like them; I've always known that. But let that be my dark spot—the spot a friend doesn't look at." "I'd rather know people for what they are as soon as possible," said I.

"Well, I shouldn't have given you credit for the usual oh-do-let-me-see business," said Jack Ford.

He has no fine feelings.

The least he could have done, in common courtesy, was to have asked me to forgive him, and said he was sorry. But there he stood, quite recovered, as if he had had nothing to do with the matter.

I wish I had walked straight out of the room.

I should have done if Sarah hadn't looked in, I couldn't let her see we were having a scene so I tried to be ordinary. I was glad to see her again. At least, Sarah takes things seriously.

Dear me, she does.

It was terrible though he deserved it.

I didn't realize what she'd come for, and when Jack Ford beamed at her and said, "See the conquering heroine; well done, Sarah!" I remembered she had been in prison, and said, "Oh, so you're out!" in a silly way, for it was such a strange thing to speak about to anyone you knew. But as Jack Ford took it cheerfully, I tried to do so, too. I thought he knew how they liked to be spoken to about such things.

Sarah stood inside the door, not noticing the room or me or anything but Jack Ford. Her face was drawn and shadowed, and her eyes glared at Jack Ford.

"I've come for news of you," said she. "No one could give me any; they say you've not been near the meetings lately—"

"Well, you see, I've been awfully busy," said Jack Ford, losing his confident address.

"And I hear you ran away," said Sarah, never taking her eyes off him. "For the same reason, I suppose."

"Well, the fact is, I—I—" began Jack Ford. I knelt down and began banging the books. It was really too painful.

I couldn't get past Sarah to go out.

"I funked it," said Jack Ford trying to swagger.

"So I heard, but I wouldn't believe it," said Sarah, steadying herself with her hands behind her back. "But I'm getting used to missing faces. They told me it was no use coming; it was better to leave you alone, and go on; but I wanted you to know what I thought."

"Don't trouble," said Jack Ford.

"It's a pleasure," said Sarah. "I think it's a good thing for men to know how they strike us;

the men who promise to help us. I believed in your help, you see; the others don't believe in anything from any man. They are right. We shan't get help from men; they're too busy when it comes to doing. Too—"

The only possible thing to do was to put my fingers in my ears. I could feel them at it, and felt her go out at last, like forked lightning, but I didn't dare look up when the door banged; I knelt here, dusting the books vigorously, pretending nothing unusual had happened. From the way Jack Ford was flinging things into a case, I could see how upset he was. I didn't know he could be angry, or that anything could happen which he couldn't laugh about.

I asked where the books were to go, in as casual a voice as possible. I was so horribly ashamed for him. He said he was putting them into the smaller boxes, and plunged stacks of things into the case, as if he were taking potshots at an enemy. He was too angry to talk, and too proud to tell me to go. If I had got up, it would have looked as if I had noticed something. The friendliest thing seemed to be to stay and help, and talk about the packing. Although we both know we were only covering up a painful situation, and not

really covering it up at all. Still, there are times when the most transparent people have to act they're feeling differently from how they are.

We were clearing the room gradually, and I was covered with dust,—blouse, hands, hair, and all, when a rattle of voices sounded and in burst Simon, Stephen, and the Bird Boy, all very excited; especially Simon who sat down directly he got in and said he disclaimed all responsibility for any rubbish they liked to talk, and lit a cigarette in what was meant to be an impassive manner, but anyone could see he was feeling the world hardly big enough to hold him.

The Bird Boy and Stephen talked at once; in a minute or two I found that Simon had had a play accepted; to be put on in the early autumn.

They were so excited that it was several minutes before the Bird Boy looked round and said, "But why all this thusness?"

Then Jack Ford told his news, and the Bird Boy threw up his hat and caught it nimbly and said: "Invite me to dinner. I have begun a new lease of life. Battersea is rapidly ruining me in taxis. Now you'll only be two corners."

"Does the Aunt leave maids and everything?" asked Stephen.

The Aunt was leaving him a French cook, so that he could feed his friends into friendship; she was leaving everything that any young man could want on this earth, and had insisted on her florist arranging the flowers for special dinners. Jack Ford said he should have a stag dinner every Sunday, and gave the three of them a standing invitation. Stephen asked if the Aunt would preside and the Bird Boy doubled himself up, and Jack Ford said rather not, she knew her place, and his. All that she asked, was for an illustrious man to worship, and the more illustrious he became, the better pleased she'd be. He said she liked him because he made it so extremely clear that woman's province stopped at providing dinners.

I couldn't have believed Jack Ford was uttering such hateful things. The others laughed and the Bird Boy rubbed his hands and said Jack had returned to sanity and he would end as a bon vivant. Men who could make coffee, always did. He smothered his face as if he were awfully pleased. How I despised him for such pitiful flattery. Then Stephen said they must celebrate the double event, and suggested dinner somewhere. Simon said it must be his dinner, and what about the Gourmet. The Bird Boy said they must go on to

Pavlova. Jack Ford said he had meant to go and began to hum a tune while he cleaned some boots. It suddenly occurred to me he might want to change. I said I thought the books could get on by themselves now, and he thanked me, but not effusively. They were all quite polite, but they were plainly sufficient to themselves to-night.

I went out, feeling pushed out. Just pushed out because I wasn't a man. I wanted to be a man; I wanted to go out to dinner with them, and have fun, instead of sitting alone, thinking, thinking—

Oh, those women who were content to sit and sew things, had an easy time of it. Nowadays, we are women and men together. Part of the time we want to go out into the world, and rattle about with cash in our pockets, and have fun; part of the time we thrill to be doing big work in cities and offices; part of the time we hark back and want the old comfortable days of quiet huswifery and all the time, all the time we want to be companioned and safe and loved.

How jolly it must be to have friends to drop in on you and carry you off; friends to dine with every Sunday; rich aunts to pet you and wait on you; and a hard, thick-skinned temperament that never, never feels. Here I am, in my lonely room, with a row of photographs for company, photographs of men who would stare out of their scornful eyes and curl up their noses if they knew a little rat like me had adopted them for friends—her only friends.

For Mr. Richard isn't a friend. Jack Ford isn't a friend. I can't depend on either.

I've just a row of photographs, pretence people, whom I pretend look at me now comfortingly and say: "Buck up, young un, put your back to the wall, and don't grizzle."

A martyr in a lonely house Had better iron her Sunday blouse; And then her whines she'd best be stopping And run outside and do her shopping.

### CHAPTER XV

#### MR. RICHARD BACKS OUT

June 30th.

THE mail-bags have been found. Miss Beckles read out the paragraph at lunch. I ought to have been relieved that the issue would now have to be faced and settled, but I wasn't. I had the funniest seizing inside, as if something I'd forgotten had gripped me again. For if they hadn't been found, I suppose I should have gone on at the office as usual, for ever. But now the whole business will have to be stirred up again; and the question of the apology will come up. I don't believe, for a minute, those notes were in the mail-bags; Mr. Grainge would most certainly have taken some steps to discover the donor, if he had had any reason to suppose notes had been sent. And as far as I know, he's done nothing; and even if the mail-bags are found—the business of the counterfoil won't be cleared up.

I feel as if something terrifying and disturbing's coming; something I'm helpless before; I felt like that when father became really ill. Well, I got through then; I must get through now.

I've Mr. Richard now, and I had no one then.

I hate the summer. He is away this week. He might have told me. I seem to know less and less about him instead of more. If it weren't for the roses every Saturday, I should begin to think I had made a ghastly mistake, and I mean nothing to him.

After all, if anything happens at the Alliance, he will have to be definite.

# July 3d, Saturday.

I have to record a solemn ceremonial to-day, the burial of my Fighting Line. If I had had a fire, I would have given them the honours of cremation; but when one has three pounds between oneself and starvation, one can't go in for any unnecessary ritual. Even matches count. Besides I didn't feel like spending anything more on any men. So they were consigned to the depths of my tin box, my rubbish tin. Now my mantelpiece is free of a row of hypocrites.

That's what English men are-hypocrites, hypo-

crites; posing as being strong when they are weak—weak and contemptible; posing as being dignified and powerful; posing as being just and working for great causes, when they haven't the least element of justice in them, and are unmerciful, tyrannical, pushing out of their way all those who might make things uncomfortable for them; those who care for being true and honest.

I have received a curt notice that my services will not be required again, and an extra week's salary, turning me off as if I'd stolen or done something wrong. They haven't given me a chance to keep my berth by apologising. The notes haven't turned up; Mr. Grainge is proved indisputably a liar, and gets rid of me. I noticed how worried he looked when I took his letters yesterday, but he hadn't the grace to tell me what he was going to do. It might have been disagreeable for him. It was easier to send a note up with my money.

I'm beginning to agree with Miss Beckles. Men aren't to be trusted with so much power. It isn't good for them. They can use it to make things comfortable for themselves, not to protect the weak. They do use it for that, and when they're accused, they say discipline must be preserved;

it's essential for the Empire that men should be strong and in authority, and for that end women must be kept weak and subjugated.

Strong people aren't afraid of weak people. It's the weak who fear, and men are afraid of women. They daren't let them into their professions; they're afraid of being supplanted. They daren't let them into power in the City; they're afraid women would share the money that they make.

When all posts everywhere are thrown open to competition irrespective of sex, I'll believe men aren't afraid of us.

Everything Miss Beckles has been saying, is coming home now. But I wouldn't let her know what has happened. It's too horrible. I didn't speak to her or Miss Patten about it. They've got to work on under Mr. Grainge; if they don't find him out, so much the better for them.

They're safe still. They've got their salaries ahead of them. But I, I— Miss Patten promised me a cross-stitch pattern for Monday. But I've something besides needlework to think about. I've got to get another job. And where am I to go, without a reference, or being able to say why I've been turned off at a minute's notice? Suppose I

say I've been at the Alliance, and the new people ring up about me? I should think they're certain to, if I can't give a written reference. A nice report they'd get from Mr. Grainge.

It's no use indulging in the luxury of lashing out against people and powers and all the rest of it. I've got to face the position, squarely. I've four pounds, twelve, all told; there is six shillings a week for rent, I can manage on five shillings a week for food at a pinch, and I can walk, and save fares as much as possible. I shall get through the worst part of the summer, even if I don't get a job. I may get a job next week. If people would only try me, I know I could make good. And I'll do anything. There's no need to be afraid. Let Mr. Grainge turn me away; the Alliance isn't the only office in London.

But oh, it's the only one where Mr. Richard is. If he were here, he'd know and come to me; but he's away. I ought to write and tell him, but I'd so much rather write when I have another job. Then it won't seem like asking—

I couldn't ask him to hang me round his neck because I can't keep on my own feet. It's one thing to give up a settled berth and marry a man from choice, because you love him; he must feel indebted to you, then. But when a man marries you because you can't keep yourself, when he feels you're dependent on him, and he's got to marry you—why, Mr. Richard would feel I was a burden. He hates being tied. He loves me because I'm independent. I must keep my independence now.

I can't tell him without making him feel uncomfortable and responsible, until I have a job.

But oh, to have someone, someone, so that I shouldn't feel so utterly cut off.

I miss Jack Ford; there is a great spot of silence now, where there used to be a nest of happy, human sounds. His voice never rings out through the wall, making one forget everything miserable and ugly. As long as he was there, I was "through" with a human voice, and a human centre. I could have gone in to him, if I'd been hungry; I could have told him anything like that, and he would have helped me through with the same matter-of-fact kindness as that with which he'd help anyone. He doesn't attach importance to helping people; or cheering them; or quarrelling with them. It all comes in the day's round, and next day he begins again.

Now he's away, I can forgive his little foibles,

his little vanities, even his insults. I'm a rebel now, and could cry out with him against injustice. I wish he hadn't gone.

If the Something that governs us, is friendly, surely Jack Ford would never have been taken away.

Maybe it's selfish; maybe he will succeed now he's in Aubrey Walk; maybe I ought to be glad at his good fortune—but it isn't human to be glad when the few people that one knows, are taken off and popped into different worlds into which there's no admittance. Jack Ford belonged so naturally to this old building and the scrambling life one lives up here; I can't see him in a tail-coat and topper, trotting round to parties and chit-chatting with fashionable ladies.

He doesn't dance, and I don't believe he ever will.

What a happy time we had, we two outsiders,
when we both seemed leagues and leagues removed from Carol——

July 11th, Sunday.

Well, I thought I knew what humiliation means, but I didn't.

I thought men could rub in one's insignificance,

but they haven't begun to be as clever at that, as women. I've been to five employment agencies and I've met one woman who didn't suspect me, and I didn't tell her I couldn't get a reference, I didn't dare to.

But the others—directly I said I was sorry to say I could give no reference, and preferred not to say where I had been last, and could I be tried on my merits, they froze, one after the other. Naturally I became nervous after the reception I had with the first I tried; such a nicelooking, able woman too; but directly I began to explain I couldn't say where I had been or give a reference, I saw how queer it sounded and began to blush, and she looked down at the desk as if she were very, very doubtful, and sorry for me, and I got up and said, "I see you think it's no good," and walked out.

I made myself sit still and let the others tell me that; and the last place I was deliberately dishonest and said I had left as the summer was coming on, and didn't speak about a reference. I gave the name of the Alliance with all the assurance I was capable of, as if I was proud of having worked there. But the end of July is a bad time.

I have answered advertisements, I have tramped

up and down all day, there's the same story everywhere; a bad time of year for extra rushes where people take on extra hands without being particular about their past; and the demand for credentials, when I strike anything worth while and reputable, and millions of typists with magnificent credentials ready to oblige the demand. I've two pounds left.

# July 25th, Sunday.

My shoes are wearing thin, both pairs; I'm beginning to know what real poverty amounts to, not apricots and cream-and-cocoa poverty. I'm trying oatmeal, and I feel sick and ill at the thought of meal times. If every scrap wasn't precious, I should hate it worse than I do. In a way, I'm glad I can't eat much at a time. But oh, the length of the days when one doesn't go out Saturdays and Sundays, when everything's closed, and it would be sinful waste to use my shoes. I feel I shall go mad with nothing to do, no one to speak to. I pray I shan't break down; I pray I shan't answer Mr. Richard's letter.

He's away till August. He still doesn't know I've left.

I pray, I pray I get a job before he comes. I'm

so weak and silly now I should cry if he came, I should break down and ask him to take me, I should hang myself onto him and hate myself for it ever after, and so would he.

I must think of something else.

# Sunday night.

I've been looking through the tin box; I've never read father's manuscripts before; what a lot he wrote; a novel tied up, all yellow; bundles of poems, three fat exercise books full, and any amount of odd things which want sorting out. It will be something to do, almost like having company. How odd to read what father wrote at last. He must have minded no one being interested. Knowing Jack Ford has made me feel kinder to father.

### Later.

Of course if father saw all the messes we were in, as early dawn and the burial of the seed, he could afford to wait, hopefully. He keeps saying again and again, in different ways, that those who fight for what's right, won't have success easily; but they'll surely win through, and the only way is to go on believing and upholding truth, truth,

truth, and the truth is that the sun is there, the truth is that God is there, that Good is first and upmost and worth fighting for. He keeps crying it out; he keeps saying it in every poem, if he's only making a verse about the wind, or the little brook, or a baby.

He did love the country; I wonder why he didn't live there. We always have lived in London.

It's awfully funny; I feel as if I've suddenly made friends with a person who understands everything I like and can talk about it; someone who's patting my shoulder and saying, Buck up, it will all come right. Truth will win. Truth must win. And you made your stand for Truth.

Oh, if I'd only known what father was thinking and writing when he sat in his big chair day after day, evening after evening, scarcely ever speaking and looking helpless and worried when we bothered about the bills. But it's worse to remember the envelopes that came back day after day, and worse still to remember when he came back from tramping round Fleet Street; he used to give us the money that did come sometimes so patiently, like a child, bringing home what he could. At one time, there seemed a better run of luck, I remember, when he did translating, but in the last

three years there was nothing regular, and we lived on his books. I thought it was a good clearance to get rid of them, they needed so much dusting.

I can see him going up and down the shelves, picking them out, looking at one, and putting it back as if he couldn't let it go; and then, when we had to have food and the rent was clamoured for, he had to go back and pluck out his treasures that he was trying so hard to save. Then the shelves grew empty, and I began to use them for my work-basket and anything else, and the room lost its cosey, bookish, air, and became bare and poor.

I remember one little incident so well; it hurt me, even then. Father had been working at the table, absorbed as usual; I was piecing out a blouse from an old dress of mother's, and suddenly I looked up, and there he was standing at the shelves, searching among the few, few volumes. I can see him turning round with his mystified, dreamy air, asking if I knew where his *Virgil* was. I asked what it was like, and he said it had his college arms on, and I told him the last of that lot had gone three weeks ago, when I had to stump up for my Polytechnic fee. I thought him unpractical

for having forgotten; I spoke in the way I always used to speak to him, impatiently and hardly. I can see him stand looking at the place where the book used to be, and then turning without a word and going back and bending his head over the papers and writing, writing. I remember feeling sorry, and taking extra trouble with the soup so that he should enjoy his dinner, and I remember being angry because he never noticed; he never knew what he was eating; I had tried so hard to make it extra nice and had mashed the vegetables through a sieve though I was frightfully, frightfully busy. I had my one chance at that Polytechnic. Then, when father pointed out the beautiful pale sky, I said it was grey and shut him up.

I did think he might have noticed the soup, and it wasn't pleasant to think he was making sacrifices for my Polytechnic fees. Though I was right to insist on going.

And the stuff that he was writing was hopeful and faithful through it all. I call that being truly brave.

Just as I've been wanting someone to speak a friendly word to me, and pat me on the back, so father must have wanted sometimes, someone . . . I don't believe mother encouraged him; I remember her, always busy and clever with her hands, but worried, oh, so worried.

Aunt Minnie reminded me of her in a ghastly sort of way; mother had a rather curious accent; of course Aunt Minnie speaks a sort of dialect.

Father's voice was beautiful. In a lanky, indecisive way he was rather fine looking; I used to picture Don Quixote, like him. I can't get over him sending out those brave messages from his prison, and no one ever reading them. That was the last straw, to know they were doomed to burial, unheard, useless. Yet when he died, his eyes were happy. I thought the happy look was because he was getting out of the bills; but I remember thinking him very patient to smile like that at me. Now I know he was smiling because he wasn't afraid for me any more than for himself, even though he hadn't seemed to bring anything off.

I'm going to read every word of everything he's left; I must do something to keep me from thinking of what will happen when my last pound's gone.

After all, if father made a mess of his life, I've made a pretty big mess of mine. I thought people

could always get on if they tried hard enough, and were practical. Well, father's message is that the sun is there, and our business is to fight the devil Despair.

# July 28th, Wednesday.

Somebody else ought to read this stuff; it's too good to be reserved for one person. Other people are bothering and fearing and fighting like me; these poems ought to get through to them. They've bucked me so. When the days bring nothing, I stiffen more; I come home thinking of the good evening I'm going to have with all the stuff I've yet to read, and all the other stuff to read again. I say lines to myself, when one office after another turns me back. I fight, consciously, visibly, with London—the great nightmare, London. I say to myself, this is only the earthy time and the sun is there, and I'll surely get through. In the meantime, there's the lovely warm summer, there's my dear little sky parlour, there's peace and quiet and freshness up there at the top, there's enough to go on with and I'm not going to get left. I won't, I won't give in, I won't despair.

And it's all due to father; the messages that have lain buried in the tin box, the pages that seemed so useless. Now I've dug them up, and they're alive.

I've a good mind to send one to a paper and see if I couldn't get it printed. Now as I go through the streets, I often see such a worried, unhappy face. I see shabby people now, people who obviously haven't anything to do, sitting in the Park; I notice their boots and my heart goes out to them. I long, I long to say, Buck up. I long to say, "You can keep happy through it all, anyway, however it turns out; the seed isn't dead; the earth isn't really cold and heavy; some day you too will wake up in the sun."

Father has said all this so beautifully and cleverly, I'm sure some paper would print it, and then who knows who might read it?

## July 30th, Friday.

I have heard the truth about Mr. Richard's feelings to me; something in me knew that what I heard was true.

In my heart I have always known it, from that first day when we met at Kew, and I knew, I knew, his world was full up to the brim with other people, other thoughts and interests; I knew he came sailing beside me for fun for a few

minutes, and then out he would tack into the wide blue seas, to return perhaps, when the wind blew him my way but always for a minute or so—never, never to stay.

I'm grateful I have learned the truth, before I see him again. I knew it wouldn't be wise to see him when my little ship is so very water-logged.

Just at the moment there is a great calm, as if something that hurt terribly has been taken from me. I shall begin to find what has gone presently, when I move about and realise Mr. Richard is never, never to be with me again.

I believe Carol did a brave thing in coming to me to tell me. I felt to-day I knew where I was with her; if we weren't so far apart I felt we could be friends. In a way, although we are so far apart, I feel she is a friend. Spots in her are absolutely true; though I can see there might be times when I should feel at sea again.

It is a relief to be cut off; I dreaded hanging on to him; yes, yes it is a relief to know the truth about him.

I wish I hadn't fought at all, trying to make out he cared. I wish directly Carol spoke, I could have laid him down and not held on, a minute longer. But, though it went like a knife to my heart, I couldn't help struggling at first. But that is over now.

There is one good thing—I never let out that I have only one and twopence left, and no prospect of another sou before me. It's true, I have the furniture, but if I once sell that, I'll never get a home together again. Maybe, my home will have to go. Everything else has.

Thank goodness, Carol doesn't beat about the bush; she didn't pretend she came to see me because she was passing my way, or thought she would like to see me again, or any rot like that. She looked me straight in the eyes, and said "Glad you're in, I've come to have a talk with you," and slithered down on the bed, as it was the nearest point, as deftly as her custom is.

Her babyish look had gone; she was frowning and older and spoke with the air of an experienced woman.

"You won't like what I've come to say," said she; and I knew then, what it was.

"How do you know?" said I.

"Because you know nothing of men and the world," said Carol, never flinching. "But you'll be more miserable if someone doesn't tell you. It's a shame you aren't told, and as Richard will

never have the pluck to tell you, but will just go on, not answering letters and seeing you in a blue moon and promising things, and then wishing he could cut his silly head off, I've come."

She was like her father, for all her slim prettiness, as she sat there; as powerful.

"Did Mr. Richard tell you about me, then," said I.

I looked at her; everything was whirling, but it was idiotic to try and appear unconcerned. When one's heart is torn out, one can't pretend it doesn't hurt.

"Men don't tell such things," said Carol with the faintest curl of her lip. "They put supposititious cases to you, and ask what would be the kindest thing to do? Ought they to make a mess of their lives? Men always unburden themselves when they're in a mess, and the moonlight," said Carol, looking underneath her eyelids like a proud, tired queen.

"We've been staying in the same house for a fortnight and I made him talk; I suspected what was up, but I wanted to have something which I could come and tell you; because I think it's too bad."

"How do you know he is in the mess with me?" said I.

"Because he isn't capable of being in a mess with someone else, and making love to you," said Carol, gazing at me in a way that made me know it was no use trying to be dignified. "He's not a bad sort, as boys go, boys of that type; only rather peculiarly silly. Men don't face things. They must have their cake when they want it. But now he's tired and wants to put back that particular sort of cake upon the shelf, Minette, and you're a little duffer if you ever let him take it down again."

She was looking at me sadly now, sadly and wisely, as if she didn't care whether I listened or not.

"It's strange that he troubles to send me these every Saturday," said I, and touched the great red roses—my steady luxury.

"Those roses mean a postcard to a florist and a bill when he's forgotten that he ever sent the order," said Carol in the same level tone.

I had never thought of that. I had pictured him sending every week, thinking of me . . . imagining me with them . . .

"I don't believe he's told you anything, I can't believe it," said I. "You're guessing, because you are so clever; you don't understand the least bit, what I feel, or what he does."

"It's the hardest thing in the world to come here, you little idiot," said Carol, and her eyes snapped. "I didn't want to come. It would suit me much better to have you go on muddling up your life with that cock-sure boy. I want you to go on messing about with him just as you're doing—d'you think I don't know that if I hadn't come, he's too cowardly and you're too innocent, ever to get straight with one another? But you're so jolly much too good for him, and it's such a jolly shame. I don't care how miserable he is, the miserabler, the better. He deserves much worse than he'll ever get in this world. But a sparrow like you—you're such a plucky little sparrow—I had to come."

Carol had relaxed into her old curled-up pose; she leaned forward, hitting me with the words, as if she were angry with herself for coming, angry at her own stupidity.

"How can it hurt you?" said I, bitterly. There she sat in her gay, slick frock and silk stockings and bright shoes, ready to go off to some party, when she'd done with me; ready to go off to Mr. Richard and dance with him, and listen to him in the moonlight; and there I stood in the blouse I hadn't washed properly for weeks because of the

soap, the old working blouse I couldn't afford now to keep properly clean, and heard her talk of it being a kindness to take Mr. Richard from me. She blinked her eyes in a funny, secret way, and didn't answer.

"Supposing what you say is true, what business is it of yours?" said I; oh, I was angry. She looked so fresh, and so well taken care of.

"It's never anybody's business to do a disagreeable thing to help anyone," said she; "I was a fool to come, and I shall repent it ever after, and yet I've come." She paused and sat nursing her knee and blinking and glowering at me in a babyish, sulky way, which was more natural than the grown-up air. "I don't expect you to admit I'm right, but think it over and keep your eyes open, and you'll find out, now you've had a jolt. You won't be able to keep from thinking of what I'm telling you. Richard is thoroughly happy in the state to which he has been called, and knows it, and wouldn't change for anything. He'd have to change his state very considerably if he married you, and he knows that too. He doesn't want to marry at all, and if he does, he'll choose a girl who can fly round with him and do the things he's used to doing."

"Like yourself," said I.

I knew it was true; but it made me feel as if all my skin was being stripped off.

"Heavens, no!" said Carol. "I want something better than that. He's vain enough to like being noticed by me—" Carol humped her shoulders ever so little. I longed to tell her Mr. Richard had thought her over-dressed; "the sort of woman one meets at restaurants" . . . "But I wouldn't bother with him seriously. He'll only really give up his freedom for a girl who can plaster it on so thick that he can't live without it. He's been jolly near making the mistake of his life—of both your lives—"

Carol paused.

"Do you mean I—plastered it on—" said I, and couldn't speak.

"You cannot be an idealist to-day, or you'll get left, horribly left. People are cram full of mean, beastly pettiness; they're jealous and vain and while they love their superiority to be believed in, they hate you when you insist on them living up to your ideal of them. It's a tug to have to be true and generous and unselfish all the time. You're not loved for your virtues by the people

who aren't as virtuous as you; you're a standing reproof to them, specially when you take it for granted they're after the same things as yourself. Only noble people can love noble people, and there are precious few of them about. Richard isn't one of them. He's the ordinary, selfish, spoiled young man whose school has educated him to think he's the salt of the earth, and its principal adornment. Your precious Empire is the result of millions of these selfish young men imposing themselves on a plastic universe, and followed by their adoring women-kind to the far ends of the globe. I really do believe the Victorian woman would have followed a man to Hell, if he'd held out the enticement of stroking his lonely pillow. To-day, women are beginning to go out by themselves, and some day they'll handle their share of the booty; however, that won't be in our time. We're only at the stage where we are refusing to spend our lives stroking the lonely pillow. Yours would be the lonely pillow if you married Richard. Hate me as much as you like, Minette. Something in you appeals to me. You won't be able to help seeing through Richard now."

Carol surrendered her intense attitude and slipped into her usual indolent lounge, her cheek on her hand, half-lying, as if she'd finished and didn't care how I took it.

If she had talked like that before I'd left the Alliance, I shouldn't have believed her. But I hadn't much belief left in any man, and this stripped away the last illusion. Though I'd always known it, deep down, always known Mr. Richard was superior, unreachably superior . . . but just a little selfish.

"I don't hate you," said I.

I couldn't argue about Mr. Richard. As I looked at Carol, she and he reminded me of dancing dragon-flies. When a person's drowning they can't take much interest in dragon-flies' gyrations, however bright and fascinating.

I had one and twopence in my purse. It is August and there is about as much chance of getting work without a reference or any sort of credentials, as of marrying the Prince of Wales. I have my brutal indifference to father, my hardness,—all that to think about now, now I too am tasting failure. I knew Mr. Richard wasn't a friend whom I could count on, and now she had come to tell me he was miserable because he was tied to me, it was an added sting, but I didn't feel I'd lost anything by knowing it. When one

can't get a job, food is more important than feelings.

But Carol had never had anything but feelings to think about.

I had a bigger problem than anything she was talking about, at this particular minute, and Mr. Richard's character and the Empire and all that didn't make me forget it. It was nearly five and I hadn't offered Carol tea, and she was obviously staying. I had cut out tea and coffee weeks ago; also butter. I had a scrap of margarine that I had planned out for three meals, I cannot eat oatmeal without something.

But before I could let Carol know I had nothing, I would die!

These people can think me a nuisance, and show me my proper station, and I can still stand up to them, and let them see they can't touch me, can't make me break down. But if they knew I was starving, they would feel bound to help me.

"Oh, do say something, Minette; forgive me or swear at me or something," said Carol.

"I was thinking how I could best get rid of you," said I, trying to laugh. "You see, I'm very busy."

"You're working too hard, Minette," said Carol, drawing herself up with a sudden queer swiftness.

"You'll break down if you slave so. You're thin."

"I've been banting lately on purpose," said I, still trying to laugh. "Ready for my new autumn suit."

I nearly sank into the ground to hear myself talking Society talk like this. A light, airy voice seemed prattling away, outside of me.

"Will you swear to me you're not working overtime," said Carol, staring harder and harder. "I've a good mind to speak to father about it."

Speak to Mr. Grainge about me! Hear I had gone without a character! Guess that I was out of a job! Tell Jack Ford and have the two of them seeing what they could do for me!

She must be prevented from saying anything to Mr. Grainge. Suddenly I remembered what Mr. Richard had said about Carol's expeditions to Jack Ford's rooms.

"If you do, I shall tell your father how I made your acquaintance and where," said I. I meant it for a threat. I spoke coldly. It was awful to threaten her like that, but I had to get her out of the room and keep her quiet after.

Carol looked at me as if she couldn't believe her ears. Then I was angry, furiously angry, at being

despised and thought mean and treacherous, more angry with Carol than with myself for she had forced me into threatening her.

"You can't have everything," said I. "If you're one of the precious sort of women you have to stay packed up and looked after. That's your value; nothing's allowed to rub the bloom off. People like me don't matter; we can go where we like and do what we like because we're cheap. I could see Jack Ford every night if I want to, and there's no one to know or care. You know what people would say if they heard you came here by yourself to see him. If you speak of me to your father or Mr. Richard or Jack Ford or anyone, I shall speak of you and say what I know of you."

I heard myself saying these things as if a gramophone was speaking, just the same toneless sort of voice, rather shrill and loud.

She stood up, swinging one foot and looking at me as if she could kill me. As if I were threatening to take something from her, and she were defending herself.

I shouldn't have thought Carol would have cared for her people's opinion. Not as much as that.

"I didn't think anything about you coming to

see Jack Ford," said I. I couldn't let her go away with that idea. I wished I'd never passed on the sneer I heard from Mr. Richard.

But it was done, and things done, can't be undone easily.

"So it's 'Jack' Ford, is it?" said Carol. "When did you begin to call him Jack?"

"I don't call him anything," said I. "I only think of him by the name which everyone calls him. He calls me Minette."

Carol remained eyeing me in the queerest way.

"I said he would leave his nest some day and the alliance would be broken, didn't I, the first time we met," said she with a cruel smile. "I always know what's going to happen; always."

She didn't look as if very happy things were going to happen to her or anyone, that minute.

I wasn't going to stand being exulted over, in my own room. It was my room, after all, and she was plainly wanting to be hateful.

This seemed a good time to get rid of her.

I opened the door.

"If you don't go, I shall," said I. "I really don't care which."

Carol looked at me again, shrugged her shoulders

and marched past with her chin up, and ran downstairs.

I suppose I've turned a friend into an enemy.

For she was a friend. She came in kindness, in one of those sudden streaks of kindness that belong to her.

And I've repaid her by insulting her basely, abominably, because of my pride. That's all that it amounted to. I could not tell her in her triumphant smartness, her well-kept prettiness, that I had no tea to give her, not even bread or butter.

To-day, as I was coming home, I felt certain help was on the way. I felt certain I shouldn't be let down quite, quite to the bottom.

Oh, if Carol had been the help, for if I had told her it was impossible to get work without a reference and she had spoken to her father—

But no, I couldn't swallow my pride enough to take anything from Mr. Grainge, now, after he's treated me as he has done. I couldn't let anyone appeal to him, for me.

## July 31st, Saturday.

A cheque has come from *The Westminster Gazette*, for father's poem; and a little letter; the editor likes it and wants more.

#### CHAPTER XVI

#### THE VANISHING BREAD

August 6th, Wednesday.

HAVE finished the box; I like the poems best; the long things are hardest to understand; and the novel is a little disappointing. A novel ought to end happily, to leave a nice taste in one's mouth, and one doesn't know exactly how the people end in father's; in fact one doesn't feel they end at all. I like books where everyone is settled up comfortably, so that I can leave off, feeling the author has told all that can possibly be told about that particular story. In father's book, the characters might do anything after the last chapter, which is irritating and makes one want a sequel.

I don't remember hearing about this novel; but then he never said anything about what he was writing. He was rather like the man in the novel, in that respect; only the man in the novel was a careless, happy-go-lucky boy. Sometimes father's hero reminded me of Jack Ford; sometimes of Mr. Richard.

I liked him awfully.

The parts I enjoyed most are the descriptions of the country. When I read, I almost forgot the heat. The stuffy little room melted away and I was treading broad commons, looking up into the high skies and across the scorched grass to blue valleys; what a fascinating country it must be, where the ground opens in great smiling rifts, patterned with woods and old stone farms and little hill towns on the ramparts of the ridges.

It gives one quite a new idea of country people; I have always read of them as being very strong and primitive, a type apart, much simpler than the people we know in ordinary life. Country people in books always have great love affairs, in fact, think of little else; remember the sweethearts of their youth all their lives; are revengeful, and slow-witted. I think the word I want is elemental.

But the country people in father's book remind me of Miss Beckles before she became a Suffragette and Miss Patten. They are as genteel as the latter. In fact, I grew rather tired of reading about their petty squabbles, and the fuss they made of tiny slips from etiquette, and the trivialities they thought important. I could understand the hero feeling he was in a cage of white mice.

The struggle to get on, and cut a figure, and be powerful, which seemed the leading motif in the little town, reminded me of the City on a small scale.

The love story of the hero was very pretty at first, though, when he is such a hero to the girl in the farmhouse, who's yearning for London and sees this young man as a fairy prince; but it's so sad when they come up and the young man can't take her about to places, and they have to live in stuffy rooms, and she finds she has to work as she did at home. Then she becomes jealous of their own child; and the hero daren't pet her or make a friend of her; the mother is so jealous of the child becoming educated and refined like the father. This part was very painful, and I don't think, true to life. No mother could feel anything but ambition for her child's welfare.

The most harrowing part is where the man cannot succeed, and won't approach his family, though he knows he ought to, for the sake of his wife and child. Because he knows the wife would be so impressed by the wealth and social position of his people, that she would insist on his obeying

them, and then he would be in another cage again, and he must have freedom. As I read this, I could not help thinking how I yearned for freedom, and how glad I was when I was by myself, and could work out my own destiny. I wanted to get free from my people just as much as the hero wanted to get free from his family of relatives, all interfering in his work and thinking he should do exactly the opposite from what he wanted to.

But I thought the hero was a little hard here; looking back, I can see how dreadfully hard that desire for freedom makes one. I would just give anything if I could be back with father, and be cheery and kind as Jack Ford used to be to me. It doesn't do anything much, but oh, it makes all the difference when things aren't going well, if there's someone interested and friendly, who at the same time, doesn't want to boss you and criticise.

I can't help thinking that if father had had someone to take an interest and buck him up and love him, he would have got on better. The last years, he was so listless. I wish I'd asked to read his stuff. I never thought of such a thing. I never dreamed he could write anything worth while when he was so unsuccessful and unpractical. The book is sad, sadder than the poems, but all

through you feel the people are worrying through to something better; there is a certainty that sometime (perhaps in heaven), the muddling and misunderstanding will finish and the people will step out free and happy.

Father's people were worrying through to something worth while: though one is left, not knowing exactly what is going to become of them.

I've grown awfully fond of father, reading this book.

Now, when I think of his patience, I want to help him; the chance hasn't gone, for his writings are here, and I can work for them. They are a part of father; the part of his thoughts he valued most, or he wouldn't have written them down.

Oh, it is a godsend to have something else to think about, someone else to work for, at this time, when London seems a blank wall of brass or granite against which I may hurl myself in vain, for ever.

## August 17th, Tuesday.

Mr. Richard passed me in Piccadilly. He was with two ladies, oh, so beautifully dressed, and confident, and chattering. They were talking to someone in an auto, by the Ritz; Mr. Richard was

sprucer than ever, and handsomer; sunburn suits him. The little group was like a picture, standing out against the dusty street; all gay and friendly and laughing out appointments as if they lived for nothing but to command pleasure. They could take what they liked from London, flash about hither and thither, bright and beautiful.

I felt so far removed, I had a good look at them as I went by; I couldn't imagine myself with Mr. Richard now. We only came together because we were boxed up in the Alliance office, and now I've left there isn't a link between us. The hot, dusty pavement, the tiring heat, the long, long walk to Battersea were the realities that occupied me; Mr. Richard didn't help people like me, he only rubbed in the shame of being poor and insignificant. He had called me Jasmine because I shone in the grey, but he didn't belong to the grey. He belonged to the warmth in which red roses grew.

I suppose Carol thought I was seeing him and writing to him; she said he would drift along because he dare not break it off. She didn't understand that he could drift along, doing nothing, until I had the sense to see it was hopeless. Carol didn't understand I could love Mr. Richard, and yet not want to see him——

All that she did by coming to me, was to tell me something that has made me determine never to write to him again. If I turn aside, he'll go on being happy in his own world until he's forgotten all about the business. It will end, naturally, of itself.

I could laugh to think how important Carol thinks he is; I've the rent to pay, there's only enough meal for once, and I've got to keep part of father's guinea for stamps; it's only honourable. It's awful how quickly money goes when rent and food have to come out of it. I haven't heard if the editor likes the other poems. He may be away; everyone is away now.

I wish I were. It is so hot.

### August 21st.

I've put all father's poems together and mean to get them published in a book. They've been such a help to me. I want other people to be able to carry them about and read them, and fight on.

I shall go into a bookshop and see who publishes poetry books. It will mean a lot of money, but to-day I feel I shall get father's work through. It seems mad to hope for this, when I can't earn anything for my own living, but I must get some

work soon, and then every penny I can save, shall go to publishing father's book.

Sunday, August 22d.

I've been taken right up to an open window, behind which is everything I'd love to have. There wasn't even any glass between. I could stretch out my hand and touch anything. Only I was the other side of the window, and at any moment the glass might come down, and the blind. The glass and the blind are both down now.

I went to Kensington Gardens this afternoon, to pretend I was in the country. It was lonelier than ever sitting on a bench and watching the hurrying, happy people; heaps of foreigners in bright Sunday clothes, with noticeable shoes and stockings, and confident, adventurous eyes. The usual rabble of slum children tumbled on the grass; dirty, untidy little things, like scum cast up by the bright, hastening, human tides. I rather wonder at them being let in. They so palpably don't belong to the leisured, well-kept air of these Gardens where every flower is ticketed and precious and tended in the most scientific manner possible. The elegant dogs that run about, and the healthy well-washed, well-groomed children with their nurses,

are in their right places here. But these dirty, unkempt creatures spoil the Gardens and make them shabby-looking.

I was sitting there, grousing away, feeling unutterably alone and cut off from comfort and elegance, and longing for it till I nearly burst, when a friend dropped out of the skies—the Bird Boy.

I might have been a truly friend from the delighted way in which he hailed me, and sat down by me as naturally as if he had met his sister or cousin or something. He was frightfully smart to-day in a tail-coat and topper and beautiful gloves; he glittered with sleekness and fashionableness and perfect grooming.

He asked how the sky parlour was, and if I'd seen Jack Ford lately, and said London was at its best in August; one could begin to digest it and get the taste of it a little; the rest of the year was spent in bolting it down. I couldn't taste anything but oatmeal at the moment, I don't believe I'll ever get rid of the taste. When he said he was going to Jack Ford's to tea, and asked me to come too, and see the new house, I couldn't resist the temptation of sitting down to proper cake and tea and bread and butter, though I knew Jack

Ford would have asked me himself if he'd wanted me to come. But at a certain point, the finer feelings become blunted. I wanted company so badly; I wanted to go into a nice house in Kensington and be with people who would chatter and laugh. I tried to say no, but I couldn't.

It was jolly to be walking along with someone; I enjoyed his spruceness; I was let in to the gay, smart company, and no longer a slum person. The Bird Boy was so nice, too. He said he always allowed himself adventures on Sunday, as a rest from the tedium of the respectable week, and he suddenly stopped behind a little girl in boots to her knees, a short full-skirted satin coat, and babyish white hat, and whispered that he was certain she was an Infant Star. She was attended or proprieted by two snuffy women in black, ambling along conversing together and watching the glances cast at the child who rejoiced further in long flaxen curls. We escorted them the whole length of the Flower Walk, and the Bird Boy only stopped because he was laughing so hard, he had to get his breath.

The child was kicking a pebble with immense viciousness as if the original sin and vulgarity in her defied boots, silk stockings, satin coats, and

relatives. The Bird Boy called her "Little Vera," I thought her a Little Beast. Though of course her commonness was funny.

But oh, it was jolly to be laughing with someone, and enjoying myself like everybody else.

Then we left the Gardens and climbed up a steep hill, with charming small houses in gardens, and came out on the top, into the quaintest small street, a sort of Jane Austen row, on cobbled stones with spick and span railings in front of the houses, and window-boxes, and brilliant knockers, and silk curtains in the windows. I don't think I've ever seen anything so small and expensive and aristocratic. There was such an old-world calm up here, that I felt hushed and diffident; but the Bird Boy strode along with easy confidence as if the street belonged to him, and when we stopped before a tiny white house with a bright blue door, he looked up to the top window and whistled.

Oddly enough, the row of tiny houses reminded me of our doors on the top landing in Battersea; they had the same denny look—and when Jack Ford poked his head out of the window and called out, "Half a sec," I felt at home.

He was just the same, smiling and square and cheery, for all his elegant light suit and spandy tie.

Just the same in the wring of the hand he gave me, and the drawling greeting, "Why, it's Minette, how awfully jolly!" Just the same in the way he led usup the most toy-box little staircase; up and up, till we came out into a room which astonished one by its size; a room with beams and rafters like our rooms, and with big windows each end overlook-But there the resemblance stopped. ing trees. The room was elegantly furnished. The carpet was so thick, one sank into it; there was a grand piano, polished rosewood cabinets crammed with china, heavily upholstered couches, heaps of pictures: it was a real Kensington drawing-room, and the tea-set on the tea-table was of solid silver. sparkling till it dazzled me.

A silver tea-kettle was bubbling over a spiritlamp, and he made tea and waited on us, and I sat in a luxurious armchair and ate thin bread and butter again, and cakes with sugar on the top, and thought how silly I was not to have known I could always creep into Jack Ford's rooms, wherever he was, and he would always be glad to see me, and kind. He was so kind now; pointing out the tennis club, and the gardens behind, and saying he'd meant to come and see me, and he must do so now he knew I was in town. Then the Bird Boy sat down and played, and Jack Ford jumped up and said he wanted to try over something, and the Bird Boy and he made music; I asked him to sing, "When I am laid in earth," and I was back in the happy days, and Jack Ford was again singing the sadness out of me. Yet, in a way, he was different; I thought then it was his smart clothes, maybe, and the easy way in which he moved about and belonged to all the elegance. But there was something else.

I am an idiot to be disappointed; I am an idiot to have idealised him.

Somehow, when a frou-frou of silken noises swished on the stair, I knew. I can see Carol running up, and standing stock still as she caught sight of me, looking as if she'd seen a ghost, and then slowly reddening. Jack Ford was redder, too. For an awkward moment Carol looked at us, as if asking explanation.

The Bird Boy was the first to greet her; then Jack Ford said it was a gathering of the clans, and I told her I had been brought to see the new house.

Carol settled onto the sofa, studiously polite, as if she were the hostess, and could rise to any circumstances, however trying.

"I thought you'd come to offer congratulations,

possibly," said she, swaying her foot and leaning back as if she owned the room and Jack Ford. "I hope she has congratulated you, Jack, with proper appreciation."

I had known, somehow, directly she had come. But my heart jig-jagged up and down, all the same, when she said this. I said I hadn't known it was announced, and Jack Ford said hastily he thought I knew.

Then Carol said engaged people were the most tiresome of all species of humanity, and she could not understand why innocent people allowed themselves to be bored by listening to the plans of self-centred, egotistic idiots, and now she had to talk carpets and china.

It was a pretty straight hint.

Jack Ford went redder and redder, and said he never wanted to enter a furniture shop or see a catalogue again for the rest of his mortal days and wanted the Bird Boy to stay and have some music, but the Bird Boy had another call to pay, and of course I couldn't stay without him.

When we got outside, however, the Bird Boy didn't seem to be in a hurry, but said he was going to take me for a country walk, and dipped through a couple of streets till we came to quite a good

pretence at a lane. A boarded fence overhung with trees, ran along beside us, and opposite were the backs of gardens with lovely flowers and fruittrees. The lane wound along, until a wall cropped up, and we were in an alley of trees, and might have been in the country, it was so shady and birdfilled and green. The Bird Boy said it was like Versailles and Le Petit Trianon, with a touch of Queen Anne. Old Seadogs and Maiden Ladies lived in the houses, burnt night lights, had mantelshelves of Bristol Glass, chests of Sheffield Plate, dined off Nankin china, and talked to parrots, and embroidered worsted fire-screens in their spare time when they weren't drinking tea with one an-Old Seadogs adored Orange Pekoe, and that's why they always chose houses next door to Maiden Ladies when they settled down. He said he thought there was a clause in the lease of every house at the top of Campden Hill, that it must be let exclusively to Admirals or Maiden Ladies.

I asked how Jack Ford came there, and he explained his Aunt was a Maiden Lady of the most Maidenly kind, and if Jack and Carol ever did go through with it, they would have to take a flat, as Carol belonged to the order of people who must

live in a flat in Kensington. Personally, a flat would give him asphyxia.

He rattled along, while I walked beside him, marvelling at his invention, and very glad he was in such a talkative mood for I didn't feel I had an idea on any subject under the sun. Everything was as flat and drab as if I had been pressed out by a steam roller. Jack Ford had gone from my life when he moved, but now he was marrying Carol and going to live in a flat in Kensington his memory seemed to have been taken away from me, too, and not till now, did I realise how much his memory had meant to me. It was worse than if he had died.

I ought to have known Jack Ford better than to believe he would let me be turned out of his house, and not mind.

For we heard a frantic whistle, and it dawned on us it was meant for us, and looking back, there he was posting along, crimson with heat. He came up, fanning himself with his straw hat, breathless. He had followed us after he had put Carol in a taxi, and had thought we were racing on, on purpose; we must have heard him whistling.

Of course we hadn't, of course we never dreamed of his coming after; we had thought him settled there for the afternoon. He said, oh no, he had to have a walk after having been in all day, and then seemed to shake off Carol from his mind, and we were three friends, staring at the backs of the gardens and trying to look over and just having fun. It is astonishing how interesting everything is when he is there. If I saw him every minute of my life, I should never feel I had seen enough of him.

I was almost happy again; happier than I'd been for a long time, since he left, in fact; when we turned a corner and I stopped dead. We had come to more backs of houses; piled up against the garden wall, was a hill of bread, half-way up the wall and straggling across the sidewalk. Beautiful bread, white and brown, whole loaves with a handful of crumb torn out, half loaves, pieces, rolls of all shapes and sizes, toast, and above all bread, bread in the whitest, crustiest twists and loaves. Some loaves weren't even touched.

The sight of the mound of fresh good food thrown out into the road, was the most sensational sight I have ever come across. And oh, the wickedness of throwing it away, when I hadn't tasted bread for days. It was like throwing away life. I couldn't go on. I stood and looked. For the moment I couldn't believe I was seeing rightly.

And it was there, for anyone to take away, out in the public road. I could fill my arms with those delicious little rolls, topped with a great loaf, three or four. Some looked new. I could carry back food for a week.

And there stood the Bird Boy and Jack Ford, wondering why I had stopped.

"I say, what a shame!" said Jack Ford.

"My dear Jack, they can't help it in big kitchens; it's all stale bread or pieces," I heard the Bird Boy argue.

"I'm quite sure there's no excuse for chucking it in the dirt," said Jack Ford. "It's the insolence I object to."

They were wrangling over whether it was right or wrong; and I stood a few yards off, and there was nothing but my insane pride to keep me from going over and filling my arms with it.

And a nice sight I should look, carrying an armful of bread through London.

And the two men would know, and would pity me, and send me food anonymously; or Carol would come and call in her clever way and drop some money on the floor by accident, and they would all be shocked.

"Don't you think the sun makes it an awfully pretty colour?" said I to the Bird Boy.

"So it does," said he.

I swung round; I couldn't look at it; I should cry with mortification at having to stand there, arguing about it and not daring to take it. If I could get rid of them, I could come back, and sneak a loaf.

"Well, I've got to go home," said I.

The Bird Boy suggested they should come back with me and have a picnic in Jack Ford's old rooms, but I said it would be too melancholy. I said, Good-bye, in so pointed a way that I shook them off at last, in the Gardens. I daren't go back at once, so I hung round for an hour. Then I tried to find my way back. I think I found the right street, but there was no bread there. I went circulating through alleys and avenues and back parts, till it grew dusk, the late warm dusk of August. But the bread had gone.

If the two of them hadn't seen it, I should have thought it was a vision.

There is a fatality about me. I can never go back! If only I'd made a joke of it, pretended to

be rather hard-up this particular week end, laughably said I'd economise my bread bill, made fun of it! Then they need never have suspected anything. I believe the Bird Boy would have helped me carry it. Oh, I shall never forget that mound of bread.

Yes, Campden Hill is like Versailles, and I wonder that the mob doesn't thunder up it, and break open those back doors and pull out the treasures of Sheffield plate and Bristol glass—and bread!

And I grudged the slum babies the dried grass and dusty trees; I, who have pushed into a house in Aubrey Walk, and sat on a damask chair, and forced myself amongst the people who live naturally there, whilst all the time, I am hungry for bread yes—covet the bread their servants throw out into the road.

# August 23d, Monday.

Three guineas for the poems, and one sent back. If I could only keep all this for the book. If only I had somewhere, where I could stay till autumn, so that I could save my board and rent. I can't give up my little room and sell the furniture, and yet, something deep inside is telling me

I ought to make the sacrifice, and I'll never get father's book published till I've really been unselfish. I was hard to him because I longed for freedom—I've got to give up that freedom now before I can make up ever so little, for what I didn't do for him when he was here.

# August 24th, Tuesday.

I've written to Aunt Minnie, asking if I might come for a visit, and help her, as she offered.

# August 27th, Friday.

Aunt Minnie says yes. She writes like a servant. She lives at Woodbine Villa in a Road. One can't conceive of Villas in the country. She will be glad of some help with the children as her Lady's Help has just left, so my coming "will suit, nicely."

I never realised there would be children now. Aunt Minnie was mother's youngest sister, of course, but one thinks of her as a contemporary. Oh dear, they will be my cousins.

I am an idiot to feel so snobbish; they have every right to feel snobbish about me, living in an attic, with no lady's help, not even a charwoman. But life in a London attic is not genteel. And Aunt Minnie's letter is exactly what she is and the beastly little Totties and Alberts that will cling round my neck—

I must pull myself together. If I am going to make a sacrifice, let it be done decently.

The country will be lovely; it's awfully good of her to have me when I snubbed her so at father's funeral; and I'll work like a nigger so that I earn my board twice over.

That's the best I can do, at present.

Now I've got to see about getting rid of my furniture.

# August 28th, Saturday.

My room isn't to go; not yet, not entirely, oh, I could sing and sing for joy. I couldn't bear the thought of my little home being broken up. Though there is that possibility—Sarah is funny.

Little did I think when I started down the Strand with father's book, that the banners and News placards of the Suffragettes bore my release from trouble in their train. For giving up my sky parlour was the hardest thing of all. As long as it is mine, I have a nook in London.

Who should thrust *The Suffragette* in my face but Miss Beckles, as unconscious of my identity as I was of hers, until I spoke. It was a surprise

to see her in the street at eleven in the morning, and then she explained she was on her holiday and had thrown in her lot unreservedly with the W. S. P. U. for the fortnight. Miss Patten was still at the Alliance and everybody else, and they missed me awfully. The conversation was punctuated with dabs at the passers-by and the sale of a Suffragette, so I was able to evade news of myself, except that I was out on business for the person I was working for at present (father). She asked what line of work, and I said he was a writer. She said she'd often thought of trying for a secretary-ship, and I let it rest at that. In a way, it was true. And I could not let anyone at the Alliance guess I was still out of a job.

Then she told me she'd lately met a friend of mine, whose name she had forgotten, but who was somewhere up the Strand, by Norfolk Street. If I went up I should see her. I was very curious to know who it could be, for I should have said I hadn't a friend in the world. The Suffragette was brandished at me rather uncomfortably as I peered into the eager faces, and I was beginning to feel a precious threepence would soon have to come out, when, all alone, like a young mænad, brooding eyes, dark wisps of hair, tense slimness,

standing fiercely and proudly on the kerb—yes, it was Sarah!

She refused to speak to me until I had bought a Suffragette, her eyes looked as if they would blast me if I didn't, so I forked out. I had felt the pennies coming to the surface all the way along.

Then Sarah told me she was needing a room, and had thought Jack Ford's diggings might serve her purpose, and were they still to let and she should try and look in to-night if she could get the key, and perhaps I'd let her have a light.

I didn't see it was the answer to my prayer. I only thought what ill luck it was that she should be coming just as I was going away. How blind we are—how blind,—and how patient the Something is who keeps on, offering us chances.

Sarah turned up all right, and we unlocked Jack Ford's door. His name is still upon it. It was an ordeal to go into the bare, deserted rooms. The dirt that had accumulated was unthinkable. Sarah came back with me, visibly depressed. Then she told me she had particular reasons for not wanting anyone to know her whereabouts; if workmen or charwomen came trooping up, the secret would be out, and yet, at the same time, she could not live in such a pig-sty. Nor could she spare any time to

put things right herself; every moment was now of priceless value.

"I'd help," said I, "only I'm going to Gloucestershire as soon as I can make arrangements for selling my furniture and giving up my room; or letting it furnished."

And then, of course, we were staring at each other, seeing the answer.

Sarah insisted on paying me ten shillings a week, which gives me four shillings clear profit. She also said she would replace anything damaged, and added darkly that I must take away anything I wanted to keep safe. "For no one knows what may happen," said she cryptically.

"I know the grease sometimes spatters the mat. I ought to get a bigger frying-pan," said I, meaning to be comforting. But Sarah glared at me as if I were too irredeemably trivial for words, and said she had other contingencies to face. Then she looked out of the window and said she had noticed the leads and fire escape the first time she'd been to Jack Ford's.

Of course I thought then she was afraid of fire; but no; as I was so idiotically commonplace, she had to explain she would probably be raided, and wanted the room for purposes too sinister to be disclosed. I said I would take away the tin box, and all my clothes.

But Sarah, who is really most dramatic, like a detective in a story, asked how much I would take to leave my thick long coat and winter hat behind, in case she wanted a disguise? It might suit her occasionally to look like me!

My brain whirled to know what advantage this would be to anyone. But as money was the main thing, and this was a definite offer, I said five shillings, with the promise of paying enough to buy new things if she had to go down the fire escape in them.

Sarah agreed to this willingly, and paid me, there and then, a month's rent in advance and the five shillings, and was only too glad to be able to come in on Monday.

It seems incredible that I should be sitting here with the rent off my mind, my fare and enough for new shoes, and father's three guineas intact; and a home and board for nothing after Monday.

And now I've got to pack and leave the place spotless for Sarah. I wonder if she'll keep my saucepans clean.

### CHAPTER XVII

#### WOODBINE VILLA

September 7th, Monday.

London is as far away as if it had never been. The air is fresh and clean, and the great winds sweep in from the ocean over the plain below, and the table-land on which this little town is perched, though one can hardly call it a town. The factories don't huddle round it but extend in a leisurely, unfettered way into the valleys, and there is no smoke and dirt round them. The little stone houses form orderly villages about their rectangular walls, and flowers and pigs and chickens flourish, and the hills enclose them with smiling fields and woody places.

The hills peep into the town at the end of every street, and the roads where the people live straggle along the sides of the valleys so that almost every house has a nice view. And the shop-windows are filled with churns and saddles and agricultural

implements and bacon and cheese and country-looking fruit, and there are gay windows full of bright clothes and hats, and some of the shops have quite a London flourish about their goods, and some are old-fashioned and homely like the people who jog in on carts or tramp along the dusty roads with such stout umbrellas.

It isn't a beautiful town, but there's something cosey and countrified about it; it's more friendly than London. But best are the rolling commons, up and down, over the hilltops, with huge clouds drifting their shadows across the burnt grass, or floating high, high. Oh, the freedom of the valleys that twist and turn and vanish into infinite distance, and the woods that go climbing over the ridges and the little villages and hamlets clustered on the hills, each with plenty of room to breathe in. And oh, the freedom of the roads on the wide commons, with no walls or hedges, just white ribbons laid upon the grass, and all the hillsides free to scamper over, so that one wants to run everywhere at once.

Horses gallop on the grass by themselves, free as anyone else, cows stroll by, shaggy dogs take the air, with no sign of a human being attached to them. There's plenty of room on these sweeping commons for men and beasts, and no one's afraid of each other but frolic about and pursue their business in comfort.

And onto this wonderful panorama of freedom, I look from a packed little house, tight-packed with tight little people whose minds are about as elastic and responsive as—as—buttons.

Woodbine Villa is one of a row of little houses in a road that is trying to be suburban as hard as it can, and is only frustrated by the blue hills that will poke in between the trees and scattered villas opposite. We have a long strip of garden in front with a wonderful display of chrysanthemums and asters, again refusing to look townlike. Every window glitters like a diamond, the curtains are snowy-white, and the front-door knocker winks at you. Inside, the house reeks of furniture polish, the linoleum glistens, the stained pine wainscoting, the glazed wall-papers, the fire-irons, the millions of ornaments contribute their separate sparkles. Aunt Minnie is house-proud.

She thinks of nothing else. She is always saying, "Let your light so shine," and believes she acts up to it, top-notch.

All other forms of female activity are to her superfluous and unchristian, and she considers every woman who lives in a large house and keeps more than one small maid (she has a charwoman) frivolous and worldly. She pities everyone who doesn't fit into Woodbine Villa, which is her ideal in size and everything else, of a Christian home. She pities the people who have to live in London even more. I like the cosiness and cleanness, if only she would let other people alone, especially London people.

She seems to be suspicious of me because I come from London, and persists in thinking I am looking down on country ways of living, or rather Woodbine Villa ways, for Aunt Minnie does not consider Scroose the country. She talks of it as if it were a large provincial town; in fact she says some of their shops are better than London ones, and as good as any in Cheltenham and Gloster. I stupidly happened to speak of the lunch hour, and so she apologizes every day for not having late dinner, another London habit and a bad one. I've told her over and over again that I haven't enjoyed anything so much in my life as her meals, but I don't feel she'll ever forget that stupid use of the word "lunch."

Yet, underneath all the worritting, she is so kind, and works so hard, and it's naturally difficult

to understand such a very different point of view; and she can't understand me not criticizing her ways of living just as she criticizes London ones. I don't think she could believe the ostentatious worldly folk who live in London, can see a midday dinner of good meat and vegetables and pudding, as a rare treat. To say nothing of hot breakfast every morning!

I think she sees me rather as I see Carol, and my spring suit which is very slightly slit up the middle, affects her as Carol's clothes affected me. Aunt Minnie makes all her clothes herself, and the name of a London firm inside the collar is a sort of hall-mark of fashion and extravagance.

Uncle Samuel is as proud of Scroose as Aunt Minnie of her house; he talks about it much as a Westerner might talk about the prairie town which he has helped to build. Uncle Samuel said he must take me to see the traffic on Saturday night; it would make me think I was back in London, only he'd never seen London so thick in one spot; we went out accordingly and perambulated round a block of shops. The streets were full; groups of men and boys stood about in the road; clusters of little girls, and women with baskets and families, passed, and stared into the

shops, and several buses stood along the kerb, such quaint country buses with straw in them. The whole area was easily traversed in seven minutes. Beyond these famous shops the little streets strayed off into solitary darkness. Uncle Samuel talked a lot about how amazing it was the crowds kept in this one particular spot, and brought forward a lot of reasons why this was so, one of them being that this state of things had existed ever since he was a lad.

It would be inhuman to suggest that Scroose is a darling pocket handkerchief toy-box little town that one wants to put on a mantelshelf and play with.

Like Archibald's and Jennie's farm.

Which brings me to the children, who certainly don't cling round me. Up to the present they have steadfastly refused to take any notice of me; they belong to my eldest cousin Martha, who has married and gone out to India with her husband, leaving the babies with their grandmother; Aunt Minnie is young to be that, but then the babies are very small mites of grandchildren.

I don't think I've ever seen such small trousers as Archibald's; they are about as big as my dresscuffs, and his little legs twinkle about in them in a way that makes me want to laugh and cry together; it's so brave of them to be running about by themselves like that.

Archibald has beautiful brown eyes, a cupid's mouth (such a speck of pink), chubby cheeks, and indomitable energy. The little fat legs in their absurd tweed trousers not quite to his knee, twinkle round from the minute he gets up until he goes to bed. He wears in addition a white jersey, in which he looks like a cheese maggot, so compact and long, somehow.

Jennie is four years old and mothers him. She is such a "little girl." She wears a pinafore and short skirts and is very busy with her dolls. Archibald obeys her implicitly except when the man in him has to do great things beyond the woman's sphere, and he rises up and rends a doll to pieces or flings his ball out of the window or does something heroically sinful like that. From a certain sombre light in Archibald's deep eyes I should say there is more original sin in him than there is in Jennie, though on the other hand I can imagine him rising to greater heights of resolution.

Jennie is an unselfish little thing, and smiles benignly when Archibald indulges his masculine propensities, even when her own things suffer; she feels so very much older than him, and repeats his little sayings with immense amusement.

I wish they would make friends. They retreat into Aunt Minnie's skirts when I approach, and won't go out with me. Yesterday Jennie brought me a picture-book and looked at it with me until Aunt Minnie came in and exclaimed, when she rapidly retreated and has not noticed me since. Still, they didn't cry when Aunt Minnie made them say "Good-morning" to-day, so I suppose they are getting more used to me. It is so funny to watch them pursuing their funny little occupations all day long, such worlds apart from us. Shall we, older and wiser, ever look down from another world and see mankind as children, pursuing trivialities as if they counted, all day long?

How good children are to be amused and happy with so little.

# September 12th, Sunday.

I cut my finger to-day; I'd bandaged it, and had almost forgotten about it, when two small arms were suddenly thrust round my neck; Archibald had climbed onto the arm of the chair, and was comforting me! Jennie stared solemnly from over her pictures, as Archibald consented to be drawn

onto my knee and rocked; then she pretended to have business near, and presently deigned to be amused at Archibald's prattle about a dog, which he had seen that morning and had wagged his tail. Relations being established without loss of dignity, Jennie allowed herself to be drawn up with Archibald, and both cuddled up and listened to a story. I could hardly believe the little things were there. It was as if birds had suddenly flown into my hand.

September 13th, Monday.

Aunt Minnie was both surprised and impressed with how I cleaned the brass to-day.

September 14th, Tuesday.

I helped Aunt Minnie turn out her room to-day, and came upon a photo of mother when she was a girl; she must have been a little beauty. From the way Aunt Minnie spoke, I could see she had been very proud of mother.

September 15th, Wednesday.

I am getting very tired of the way Aunt Minnie keeps on about London people; she appears to consider every London man as an abandoned ver-

sion of Mr. Richard, without any sense of responsibility, love of home, or sterling qualities. She also seems to think all London men are proud and fashionable, moving in circles of ostentatious and heartless Society. She is always comparing Uncle Samuel with them, much to Uncle's advantage. He is a prize specimen of a Husband and Father, able to provide a home for those dependent on him, regular at business, respected in his town, on the Parish Council, and a Deacon. I do think Uncle Samuel a good sort in his way, and I like to hear him prattle about the town (much as Jennie enjoys Archie's prattle; I'm afraid, one can't help feeling so jolly superior); but why compare Uncle Samuel with these mythical London men? I don't know where Aunt Minnie has come across them. It can't be in the pages of society novels, as she never reads anything except a strange little woman's weekly about housekeeping and Missions.

September 18th, Saturday.

Another cheque! Five guineas for a Sonnet Sequence; I thought a Review might like them, and I was right.

I do feel bucked. I thought nothing was going

to be taken again. But this has given me new courage, and it can all be set aside. Sarah's money over and above the rent, keeps me in stamps, and I need nothing here, for myself. No fares, no laundry even. And Uncle Samuel insists on my having "pocket-money" as I am helping Aunt Minnie; two and six a week. It is awfully good of him.

I mean to read through the novel again. The days go like lightning and there is so much sewing to do at night. We make everything for the babies and they do tumble about so; there are always buttons off and stockings through, bless them.

But Aunt Minnie likes me to get out every day, and I must take out the precious manuscript and read while the children play.

## September 20th, Monday.

I believe this is father's own story. The house is exact. I never connected it before. Some descriptions of the town and common must have been written here. Can Aunt Minnie be thinking of father when she talks about London men? The hero in father's novel is a reckless boy; he is careless and light-hearted until he comes a cropper, and all his gaiety is blotted out and he is saddled—

saddled . . . Oh, could it be father? Could the vain, pretty little country-girl who burns out her heart longing for fashion and fun, be mother? Could mother have ever expected to know London society people, like Carol and Mr. Richard and the Bird Boy? Its incredible, incredible; mother with her prickly hesitancy about what people thought, her abashed, resentful air when father talked to me of people and places he had known and seen; I always thought mother minded because she felt inferior. But Aunt Minnie resents my London habits because she feels superior; could mother and Aunt Minnie and Uncle Samuel have looked down on father? Could they have felt resentful and at a disadvantage before him, because they disapproved of people knowing more than they did themselves?

I can imagine Aunt Minnie expecting to know anyone, when she is so satisfied with herself. But she sees herself as a domestic person and has no yearnings for society. Evidently mother was considered a great belle in Scroose; then she married the brilliant young man down here on a reading party, and went to London, expecting to shine there, and found father was cut off from his fashionable relations, and wouldn't make friends

with them, and instead of taking her about, struggled to write. And then I was there and she had to struggle to clothe me and couldn't afford to send me to school, so she and father had to teach me,-oh, now I understand why mother wouldn't let me learn Latin and Greek and mathematics and the things father was always wanting to start me on. She taught me to sew and clean. If she had lived, I never should have gone to the Polytechnic. But when she died, the fear of being left alone drove me to learn something useful. I suppose seeing father at home, nagged at and miserable, made me long so for a business life where one could go out every day, work in an office, feel independent, and bring home money every week, for an absolute certainty.

I wonder if father thought country people simple and elemental when he fell in love with mother? When he wrote his book, he knew they minded about the externals, the pitiful gentilities of life, just as much as city people, far more than true Londoners who lived, as Jack Ford and I did, in the heart of the ramshackle warehouses, like sparrows on the roof.

As I read the book now, I feel as if I have lived unconsciously through a tragedy: two human lives

squeezing each other to a miserable death; father with his dreams and ideals and sensitive refinement, yearning for the world's uplifting, and mother, eager for the petty vanities of life, and hating the man who couldn't see they were important. And I, their child, trusted mother because she was practical, and distrusted and despised father because I saw him with mother's eyes; and yet, all the time, he had given me his love for something greater and wider than this grubbing after social status, and preoccupation with our stomachs and our bodies, this scouring of pans and cooking of gravies.

And now my father is my friend.

Poor little mother. She has always been out of it.

And yet it's through mother, that I'm being fed and boarded now, and saving the money to publish father's book.

I can't believe anyone could come from this free country, and be wholly petty.

And there are Archibald and Jennie rolling down the bank, squealing with rapture, enjoying the blue skies and warmth and sunshine like two puppies. What a mess they're in; but oh, my goodness, do let them be happy while they can. September 21st, Tuesday.

Oh, oh, life isn't simple. I thought I had turned my back on all its problems; I thought I had cut off from Mr. Richard for ever. And now I have got to think back again, in a new light, for Carol was wrong. Mr. Richard had got into a mess with somebody else; I ought to have known he wouldn't have talked about me to her like that. People are always turning out to be so much better than we think them.

Now I find I can trust Mr. Richard; yes, though he writes to confess, I can trust him better than I have ever done, for he has been open with me.

And he wrote directly he found out I had left, and of course could only send to my room, and Sarah forgot to send it on. He will think I didn't answer because I was upset at his news.

After thinking he cared nothing for me, his heart-broken letter is like wine, although he says he has thought of someone else, got into a mess with someone, behaved unworthily, but it's over now, and will I ever forgive him? Will I ever trust him again?

I only begin to trust him now.

He says he deserves all he's got, coming back

to find me gone, not knowing what's become of me; now he wants to see me, wants to fix things up so that he can't be such a traitor again. He asks me to save him from himself. It is just a big cry for help. And he has written to me, he says I can pull him up if I'll forgive him. I suppose, if I wrote, he would come down here.

Come down and meet Aunt Minnie and Uncle Samuel, and talk to us all in that unnatural, stuffy little drawing-room where we sit on Sunday in the small amount of space that isn't occupied by Martha's tambourines and fire screens and plaques and milking-stools, an awful procession of Martha's artistic hobbies, from painting on satin to pokerwork.

I am trying to imagine Mr. Richard listening to Uncle Samuel on London. Uncle Samuel would rise to the occasion as he did the first night, with me. We should hear of his one expedition to the Hippodrome; and Aunt Minnie would lead the conversation to Mr. Richard's views on Scroose, if she spoke at all, and Archibald and Jennie would retire into the nearest skirt and present uncompromising backs. If I could only meet him out here on the Common with the children, it would be all right. Even Mr. Richard would

succumb to Archibald. But I couldn't meet him secretly.

Once upon a time his letter would have sent me into the seventh heaven; now something in me feels old and dead, and I can read it and think what it all will mean, as if it didn't affect me at all. I'm awfully glad he's written; I'm awfully glad to think there was something worth while in what we were to one another, after all; but the something deep down which has always said he wasn't for me, is saying it more clearly than ever.

I could imagine anyone like Jack Ford loving a woman enough not to mind Aunt Minnie and Uncle Samuel, and even being nice to them, but I couldn't imagine Mr. Richard ever being anything else than put off and disgusted. Jack Ford never despises anyone; he is broad and big enough to love every sort of human being, but Mr. Richard divides everyone into classes, and never forgets he's in the top class—the class that spends money and orders people around.

I can conceive of a great love which could fuse all differences because I could feel it.

Great enough to rise above the differences of a higher station? If Mr. Richard would have to get over his contempt of my relations, I should have

to get over my fear of his. I don't love him enough to feel one with him and them. I only love him enough to want to take him away from them and keep him for myself. I should be afraid of the interests and habits and customs which he shares with them and which are so different from all those I know.

He has always been a romance; never part of my life, never something I could depend on, that belonged to me, that I didn't have to feel responsibility about, but that was natural and mine, mine. I just couldn't live up to Mr. Richard. I haven't been trained to it. If I belonged to him, I'd have to be a credit to him, and I shouldn't be.

The more I think it over, the less possible Mr. Richard seems. I don't want to marry. I'm afraid of men. They're too free, too important, too difficult to keep, too difficult to understand. I should think Jack Ford is the one man with whom marriage wouldn't be a perpetual strain, but just a happy, interesting companionship. But then, he's unique.

The publishers will publish father's poems for five pounds down; after that, and after 125 copies have been sold, I am to have all the profits except twenty-five per cent. If his poems sold, I might get enough to bring out his novel. Of course, that would cost much more; it's such an enormous book. Quite ten times the length of the poems, so that would mean £50, at least.

I have sent off the cheque I had for the Sonnet Sequence.

## September 22nd, Wednesday.

A tragedy has happened. We have to witness the results for a whole week. And little Archibald has to shoulder them. Jennie has had a birthday, and a bought chocolate cake. It was laid out on the sideboard, surrounded with chocolate biscuits, to rejoice all eyes till tea.

At dinner-time, we found the cake with the icing picked off, and each chocolate biscuit broken neatly in half; one set of halves consumed, the other halves still in a circle round it. Archibald's lack of interest in his dinner fixed the crime. Floods of tears heralded confession.

A solemn scene ensued. Archibald was led by Uncle Samuel into the drawing-room. The arrogant witnesses of Archibald's manhood were let down; we heard sharp slaps. Archibald returned, pink and shaken, to wrestle with rice pudding, and

the edict went forth that he was to have no cake for a week.

We sat through tea, judges with bleeding hearts. Jennie took a slice of her denuded cake, and we all participated in the feast. Little Archibald ploughed through bread and butter indomitably. Cake might not have existed. But oh, it is a big cake, and will be on the tea-table for a week. To make the agony more impressive and prolonged, only Jennie is to have a genuine slice; we are to indulge in formal modicums. I don't believe I can stand the sight of Archibald steadfastly ignoring cake for a whole week.

## September 28th, Tuesday.

Mr. Richard has written to say I am much too good for him, but just having known me, will help him not to make an idiot of himself. There's something in his letter which made me know I had been right; and yet hurt me pretty badly. For a big enough man would have come. I am a rotter to want him to want me, when I don't really want him. I shouldn't be so sensible if I did.

It's so jolly difficult not to feel lonely, and sorry

for oneself. I hope none of that got into my answer.

September 29th, Wednesday.

If ever I have a Fighting Line again, Archibald's photograph will lead it. To-day saw the last of the cake. Archibald has sat through without a murmur. He has not even looked at the cake. He has been gentlemanly and heroic to such a degree that I am going to take him out to-morrow and cram him with chocolates; I am allowed to put them to bed now, and I can't hug him enough. Oh, Archibald, Archibald, if you'll always stand up to your sins like that, what a man you'll be!

September 30th, Thursday.

I took Archibald to the confectioner's; he refused chocolates; he seems to have lost his taste for them. Now is he being hyperheroic? Has he pledged himself never to touch the accursed thing again, or has Nature done the trick for him? Anyhow, he is a darling, and Jennie and he, established at a little table with a bottle of lemonade and a cake with pink ice on, divided between them, looked and

felt too deliciously grown-up for words. I wonder every woman in the shop didn't fly at them. They are the sweetest little children that ever lived on this earth; and if ever they take to putting their heads in my skirts when faced with strangers, I know I shan't have the moral strength to break them of the wicked, foolish habit, any more than you would encourage your own dog to make a fuss of strangers and not attend to you.

Jack Ford would call this "the desire for human possession," but then he has never seen Archibald's trousers.

I had a nostalgia for London to-day. A lady called on Aunt Minnie who has been up for a week. I sat and writhed before this country view of London as a spectacle; it is a place to be lived in, to feel with, work with, adventure with; it's a warm, throbbing, intensely individual centre of the splendid human interests and activities of the world, not a collection of sideshows. People who are dazzled by its roar and scared at its movement, make me angry. We Londoners are part of our city and alive and alert as itself, and don't stand gaping at its size but glory in it.

I wanted the sounds and the smells of it; I

wanted to be on a bus thundering down the Strand with its intimate, packed, friendly narrowness; I wanted to hear the tide well up around the Bank; I wanted to come into the quiet of the Embankment and watch the gulls. I wanted to be part of a city where no one knew each other's business, and where one could go adventuring into every possible phase of human life. If Jack Ford hadn't left, I should go back and ask him to let me come with him exploring in the strange midnight hours; I didn't make nearly enough of London while I lived there.

It's getting busy now; I wonder if I'll ever dare go back and hunt a job again? Without any friend at hand!

I can stay on here. It's safe here.

Sometimes I think that battle with London broke my nerve, and however much I long to be there, I'll never muster up courage to return and fight again.

And sometimes, as when that woman talked to-day, the call of it sounds louder than my fear.

### CHAPTER XVIII

#### CAROL IS AFRAID

October 1st, Friday.

HAD a wire this morning. "Leaving Paddington 9 A. M. Meet train. Richard."

I had to tell Aunt Minnie I had a friend coming down; I said it was someone from the office, probably about a job; but she looked suspicious. She referred to him as my gentleman friend when I went out, and gave a lukewarm invitation to dinner. I knew that whatever happened I could never let Mr. Richard see Aunt Minnie and Woodbine Villa.

But I couldn't help thinking of him as a Prince come to rescue me when he got out of the train, thinner and handsomer than ever, and oh, so different from all the country-looking men upon the platform.

It was raining and I didn't know what to do with him. He suggested having some lunch and

marched into the big hotel by the station and ordered a private sitting-room. It was the strangest sensation to be standing there; Uncle Samuel knows the landlady and I could feel her eyes on my back. But where else could we go?

We couldn't talk while lunch was being laid, and the landlady insisted on seeing to everything herself so that I trembled at every word he uttered, and tried to make the conversation sound like a business chat. Mr. Richard couldn't understand how people gossiped here, and became angrier and angrier. It wasn't till we'd finished lunch and had coffee, that the door finally closed on the landlady.

Then he said I was looking very well, and I said I had been very well-fed lately. He put his hand out across the table as if I had disclosed something dreadful.

"Jasmine, you didn't need anything—" said he.

I wouldn't have told Mr. Richard of those days for anything. Jack Ford is the only person whom I could tell secret things about myself, like that. It would seem so much worse than it really was to anyone like Mr. Richard. But I did miss London and the fine adventurous bigness of it all as I heard Mr. Richard's voice again.

He kept on looking at me, and when I didn't answer, imagined I looked miserable, and jumped up and came to me.

"I've been a brute," said he; "but I want to do
the right thing now. We'll have our cottage in
the wood; then when I'm tempted, I shall know
you're there and it will help to keep me straight.
You meant a lot to me in your sky parlour, but
you'll mean more to me, when you're quite, quite
mine. A fellow needs something to steady him
and hang onto. You like helping lame dogs,
don't you?"

He didn't attach any importance to his people; he didn't seem to be thinking of them. But I thought.

"I rather like the country in the winter," said he. "It was winter when I took you to our wood. We'll have jasmine on the porch, won't we? and you shall have a monster work-basket and make pretty frocks for when I come, and some day, little caps, perhaps." He went very red, so did I. But I was holding on to his people; I could not help but think of them.

It would be good to leave Aunt Minnie's and feel safe for ever after; good to have a cottage of my own and nothing to do but look after it. On the other hand, I dreaded going back to the waiting and wanting, and something in the way he spoke made me know he wouldn't come often. I am much older than when I first knew Mr. Richard. As we sat there, I was thinking of all sorts of contingencies. But I shouldn't have wakened up altogether if it hadn't been for something he said.

"What a little country mouse it is," said Mr. Richard. "Such a shy little mouse. Your hair is the colour of hay with the sun on it; and you've such a sweet little country dress; it would be a shame to let London spoil you again."

London had spoiled my mother; and Mr. Richard was as far from understanding me as my father had been from understanding mother. Only I earned my living and knew more than mother did. I looked at Mr. Richard and saw he was wanting me to pet him and soothe him, not to companion him; and I saw I should bother and irritate him when I stopped admiring and grew used to him. I saw, too, we should begin the fight about the children, I always wanting them to have their proper place, and he not wanting to be cumbered with them. It would be worse than father's and mother's experience, for father didn't mind living quietly,

but Mr. Richard couldn't. He had no resources in himself. I saw that Mr. Richard was becoming ever so little bald, and I knew I should grow tired of his good looks. I knew it would be madness to saddle him with me.

Then I saw Mr. Richard's face in the glass of the chiffonier. He sat staring out of the window at the draper's shop across the way, and though his hand kept mechanically stroking my hair, I expect he was seeing the same sort of pictures as I was.

I don't know what made me think about Carol and ask after her. Mr. Richard coloured and jumped as if I had touched a sore spot. "I don't know; how should I?" said he, and in a minute asked if I had seen or heard from her. From the careless way in which he looked away, I could see he wanted to know. He was going on with his own life, just the same; I dare say Carol had something to do with his coming down here. Either he was defying her or she had persuaded him to come; she can't let people alone.

Oh, I was so tired of all the mysteries and uncertainties. I got up.

"Well, I have to take the children out for a walk," said I. "It's ironing day. It's no use, Mr.

Richard, we should never get on and your people would never be reconciled to it, even if we did. It was very good of you to come—" My voice went on in a dull, casual sort of way, and again I stood aside and heard myself talking; I didn't care; I couldn't feel; you can't go on being hurt for ever. At last, the part that is hurt dies, and then people have no power to hurt you.

Mr. Richard pretended to be very angry but I'm perfectly certain he was relieved he hadn't got to go through with it. Something had made him come down, and he felt it was the square thing to do, and his creed is to do the square thing. Now he stood right with himself.

I heard him argue unconvincingly, facing the question of his people now, and saying they would be awfully keen on me when they got to know me, only we mustn't rush it; but I wasn't taken in. At the end he became really angry, and called me hard and cold and ungrateful. We looked down on the station from the window where I stood, and I saw the signals of the up-train drop, and told him if he ran he could catch the London express, and if he waited, he would have to go by the slow train three hours later, and I could not stay with him as long as that. We heard the distant shriek,

and he picked up his hat and tore. I stayed in the room, watching him dart over the strip of ground and disappear through the gate as the train began to move; he caught it.

The landlady met me in the hall with the bill. I had enough with me—just enough. It seemed only fair that I should pay. The rain had lifted and the sun was spangling every bush and flower. The earth smelt fresh. I was astonished that I was not more miserable and tried to make myself realize that I had done with Mr. Richard for ever. But the more I realized it, the more free and peaceful I felt, as if a dreaded tooth was gone at last.

Aunt Minnie's help could come back next week; on the other hand they will be very pleased if I like to stay on, as the children have taken to me, and they don't like to think of my being without a home.

It would be easier to stay. When I think of going back to tramp round offices, my heart fails. And I love the children and the Commons. But could I live for ever in this little cramped house with those little cramped people?

If I stay, there will be chapel to be endured. Aunt Minnie mentioned it this morning; while I was a visitor she didn't think it necessary to speak of it, and besides someone has to stay with the babies and the dinner. But if I become a member of the household they both feel it would cause criticism if I didn't go in the evenings. Aunt Minnie added I might like to attend Mrs. Flint's Bible-class in the afternoon, when I should meet some nice young ladies. Mrs. Flint's class was restricted to young ladies; no domestic servants or mill-hands admitted. Aunt Minnie thought it a very progressive idea; no other place of worship in Scroose has a class like this, and it meets a real need. There are many young ladies (like myself) who are not as well grounded as they should be, before teaching.

I like Mr. and Mrs. Flint, but I don't want to be taught by either of them. I want to worry out my religion for myself. I could talk about such things with father or Jack Ford. But when Aunt Minnie speaks of serious things, I go cold and shy, as if she were talking about something indecent. I think she feels religion is rather an indecent subject, out of chapel. She changes her voice to speak about it, and looks stiff and awkward, as if such things have to be faced but it needs moral courage to handle the topic.

I can't think of religion as something docketted and ticketted and dispensed from a particular building. Father's writings are full of the religion that appeals to me, the feeling there's something bigger and nobler than our human sense of life, the groping after some undeviating Law, the clinging to certain things like truth and sincerity and duty and independence.

And Jack Ford has had a religious influence on me, though I haven't the faintest ground for thinking he believes in any system. But he believes in compassion and tolerance and honesty and kindness, and lives them, and he has made me want to be kinder and more tolerant. It's people that make me feel religious, people who live truly, without bunkum. I can't take in a neat, hard, compact little System, based on a belief in Blood and Whitewash, and Ecstasies of Unnatural Hysterical Emotion, which Mr. Flint gets into in the pulpit and strictly avoids when he comes to tea. Religion, to me, is just Us; Us living, working, loving; and the way we do it, shows how religious we are; not the words we spout or the particular building we attend, or the creed we say we believe in. How can you believe anything you don't understand? And what comprehension of the universe have Aunt Minnie and Uncle Samuel? Yet they talk glibly of believing in God. God to them, seems a glorified Mr. Flint.

Yet they do try to be kind; they do try to lead sober, unselfish lives; and they're making a big sacrifice in offering to keep me, when Miss Fitton suits them far, far better. She can wash and iron the children's clothes, sew better than I, make lighter cakes, never wants to be alone and burn gas in her bedroom, is a devoted chapelite, and Woodbine Villa to her is the Perfect Home, presided over by an All-wise, All-powerful Deitess in Aunt Minnie and Deity in Uncle Samuel. I know this from her letters which Aunt Minnie always reads aloud and sighs over. They are fond of her, too, and I don't feel they are fond of me. How can they be, when I think differently on every subject under the sun, and am always differing or suppressing my opinion for fear of hurting them?

They are keeping me because they see all homeless girls as helpless, and because father was improvident and left me without a home, and they have to take up his responsibility.

Father paid for my Polytechnic training; sold his books to pay for it; would have educated me if

mother had let him; was separated from me all the early years when we ought to have been companions, and now, I'm being a coward, hanging onto the people who condemn him; instead of using what he gave me, earning my own living, and standing for a tribute to his memory, as a successful, well-trained, business woman. Seems to me my big work in front of me, is to be a better daughter. If I start in to turn everything father has done for me, and left to me, to the best advantage, I'll make up better for all the misunderstanding than living on the charity of people who didn't understand him and already have a grudge against him, moping by myself thinking of the past, and crying pints for what can't be undone.

The past can't be undone, but it can be done over again, and somehow the way we live now, seems to take up the past again, refashion its results, and make everyone (as well as oneself) look back on it all with different eyes.

# October 2nd, Saturday.

I've told Aunt Minnie I don't feel I've the right to waste the training father spent so much on, and made such sacrifices for, so that I could be provided for when he was gone. I must get back to London, now I was so rested and set up by my lovely holiday. She went very pink and said she was afraid it hadn't been much holiday, but I told her I'd spent it in the only way I could enjoy myself—doing things. And the children had been a joy.

For the first time she said I reminded her of my mother; she always liked doing things. And of course the air down here was noted. She's writing to Miss Fitton to-night, and I'm to go back Monday week. It's rather like launching out into the ocean on the lid of a packing-case, but I've got to set my teeth and go. I unearthed my Fighting Line to-day, when I was turning out the tin box to see what manuscripts I could send away, and I've put them up again upon the mantelpiece. I've got to be bucked up. A darling snapshot of Archibald is in the middle, and one of Jennie brings up the rear, smiling in her motherly, amused way at the comic performances of her menkind, and loving them for every foolish thing they say or do, bless her good little foolish heart.

I've written to Sarah, and told her she must move to Jack Ford's rooms. It will be jolly to have her next door, though I can't rise to her heights of denunciation. Men and the world generally don't seem such a hopeless affair since I've learnt to respect Archibald's masculinity and Jennie's motherhood.

They play all day contentedly, going shopping with bits of grass, asking the way from imaginary policemen, putting dolls to bed and teaching them and feeding them; Archibald's small trousers ambling tirelessly after Jennie's sturdy skirts. They really are good little things not to scream with anger at the monotony of being a child. I used to. *How* I resented the treadmill of making up one's own amusements all day long, when I yearned for beautiful happenings and wild adventures.

I shall hate to leave the children. I do hope Miss Fitton will go away again in the Christmas holidays, and they'll need me for the week.

### October 3rd, Sunday.

I went to chapel to-night, because I felt a beast to stay away after Aunt Minnie's remarks. Who am I to bring criticism on her home? To my astonishment Mr. Flint preached a ripping sermon, not an allusion to blood from end to end. My other experience must have caught him in an unusually impassioned mood, for to-night he was his homely, kindly self, twinkling with kindness and pity and understanding; yes, understanding of the mean things we are always saying and thinking of other people. I felt a brute for having been superior to Woodbine Villa which has brought such rest and happiness to me, just at the time when I most needed to get right away from my own miseries. It is a home, a real safe little nest, and Uncle Samuel has worked all his life to keep it going for all those of his family who need a home. And Aunt Minnie has scrubbed and cleaned and cooked, and has cheerfully taken on all the extra work of those dear babies.

I kept myself from crying because I wanted to think, and also Aunt Minnie would have thought I was crying at being turned out into the lonely world again. But a little hard spot in me was reached by that sermon, and I shan't feel contemptuous of chapel again. I can't get over the unselfishness of people like the Flints; they are working from morning to night, doing things for other people, and keep bright and cheerful and

even keep a sense of humour. Mr. Flint said some quite funny things to-night.

Coming home, I had an idea about a reference. I've a good mind to try Sir Mordaunt. He always stuck up for the truth, and a high standard of uprightness would appeal to him. If I can only conquer my fear, go and see him, put my case plainly to him, and demand my right, a good credential from the Alliance, his name would carry immense weight. And he knew I typed well and was reliable. I can look him in the face now that I've done with Mr. Richard. I deserve a reference after all the work I've put in at the Alliance and I believe he'll see the justice of my demand and give me one. What an idiot I was not to think of that before. But when one is harassed and worried, one doesn't think very sensibly.

# October 5th, Tuesday.

We locked up the house this afternoon and took the children on the Common. I was wheeling the empty mail-cart, Archibald was trotting on the grass, Jennie was skipping round Aunt Minnie; we looked exactly like the little party that would come out of Woodbine Villa in the afternoon. The motors that flash by, the gay-clothed visitors and golfers belong to another world, and we look at them as we look at the horses that stray about the Common, admiring this one's coat, or that one's spirited trot. Now and then they cross close by to us and we get a strangely near and intimate view. Aunt Minnie stares frankly, at least, she never does anything frankly; but she gives a scrutinizing sideglance from her watchful, suspicious little eyes. To-day we have had an adventure which will give Aunt Minnie cause for conversation for the rest of her secluded life. It's all very well to sneer at her; it was a breath-taking experience for me, and it's troubling me a good deal more than it does Aunt Minnie. Why must I always be mocking at her and preening myself on my superior aloofness? A little group of golfers was coming along, particularly well-groomed people; I can't stare at them as Aunt Minnie does, and so I didn't recognize who was coming up, till someone stopped right in front of me. There was Carol in the newest sort of golf-coat and cap, knitted silken things, silken stockings, absurdly stout golf shoes, spandy-white. Carol tanned ever so little by the sun, with her hair flying, her eyes

humid and mischievous like a squirrel's, holding out her hand while the caddies and the others tramped smartly on.

"Don't you know who I am, Minette?" said she, smiling sweetly at me and Aunt Minnie and Jennie, for we had all halted with the shock.

"Don't go on, Aunt Minnie," said I; "this is my Aunt, Miss Grainge." For Aunt Minnie was beginning to walk on in a preoccupied manner as if she had no connection with me.

"Minette is an old friend," said Carol, including Aunt Minnie in her graciousness. "And are these little cousins?"

Children are funny. Jennie was sidling up to Carol and Archibald was ambling up. Her gay coat, brilliant lemon yellow, seemed to appeal to them as if a bright-hued bird had come to us. Jennie simpered a little, but her podgy little glove was held out, and her eyes were fastened on Carol's pretty face.

Archibald put his face up to be kissed without a murmur. Perhaps it was meeting her with us, out of doors, that made them behave so well.

Carol was staying in the neighbourhood; she named a house at which Aunt Minnie's demeanour stiffened, and a veil of self-consciousness seemed to descend. I guessed it was a big house from her defensive air. But Carol stood there, rattling away as unconcernedly and naturally as if we had been in my sky parlour.

Before she left us, she had arranged to come to tea to-morrow; she asked if she might come to tea with the children; she knew that was the one spot through which Aunt Minnie could be reached.

Though of course Aunt Minnie viewed her with suspicion, as a fashionable Londoner. I told her Carol was the daughter of my late employer which impressed Aunt Minnie with the stability of my business relations and dealings. It looks well for the daughter of my employer to take an interest in me!

In a way, it's a good thing for I can see Aunt Minnie is very nervous about my going back to London, unbefriended and alone; but I don't want to see Carol again. She makes me think of the part of my life I want shut down and forgotten. I dread having to hear her talk to-morrow about Jack Ford and the new home.

October 7th.

It is as if a feverish whirlwind has swept inside

this little house; an uncomfortable, disturbing, hateful whirlwind; but now it's gone, everything is strangely stuffy and compressed. There is as great a difference between Carol and us as between a glorious, flashing leopard and grubby little housemice. Lithe, supple, bright, and restless, Carol lollops by, pausing to cast her watchful, secret eyes upon us, then on about her business, perhaps deeming us unworthy of her notice, perhaps putting out a claw and giving a swift dab that killsthat kills-for no reason save that she can't help doing it. And yet, all the time, so beautiful and wild. She fascinates and terrifies me; when she purrs and crouches I think she is friendly; but always, always there comes out that swift sharp claw; a pat, such a gentle pat, and something in one feels dead.

Does she hate me or like me? Why does she bother to take notice of me, when we are such worlds apart? What possible object had she in coming to-day, to drink tea, flatter Aunt Minnie, make a fuss of the children, and then talk to me as if she's making a sacrifice in marrying Jack Ford?

One thing is very certain, it's impossible to know what she's really thinking. When Aunt Minnie had taken off the children to put to bed, the flow of pretty appreciation of the pure air and the home-made cakes and the children and the old china and fiddle-pattern teaspoons ceased as if turned off at the main.

"Don't you want to clear some of this out?" said she. "Chuck it out of the window?"

I felt like that when I dusted the drawing-room; so much of it is rubbish. But it wasn't Carol's place to remark on this.

"I always think this room is so cheerful," said I; "so sunny."

Carol looked at me under her eyelids, and then laughed.

"Like Aunt Minnie?" said she. "She's quite contented, isn't she? Twelve feet square is quite enough for her! And the memorials of the family provide sufficient food for thought. When people are poor, do they always sit in the midst of their families and gloat over them? Doesn't she ever want to make a funeral pyre of Maud Emily, or Matilda Jane, or whoever it is—the daughter's trophies of a misspent youth, and fling herself into life?"

"Aunt Minnie's idea of life isn't yours," said I, "it's much more purposeful."

Carol deigned to give me a blank stare.

"She's built something solid with her life," said I. "She's built a real home, though it's a little one."

"And stagnates in it," said Carol swiftly. "Purposeful? Do you call it purposeful to cram a room with bits of rubbish, and spend your days cleaning and admiring them?"

"She does a lot more than that; she's bringing up those children, and she's been having me, and she does all sorts of things for people," said I, feeling all the time how pitifully unimpressive was everything Aunt Minnie did, in the eyes of this vigorous, bright adventurer.

"I'm not insulting her or you," said Carol, dropping down upon the sofa in a floppy, odalisquish way, in which it had never been sat on in the whole of its sedate existence. "I'm trying to learn an object lesson, and I don't want to learn it, and yet I know I've got to. I'm trying to understand fully and completely, what it will mean to be domestic and poor and have a family," Carol shuddered.

"I suppose it takes one person all her time to look after those brats?"

"A person doesn't want to do anything else,"
I flamed. Brats!

"Not that they're bad little nippers," said Carol, "but oh, I do not want to be poor. I am not made for being respectably poor. I could live in an attic on dry bread and cigarettes, but I cannot live in a little house, domestically, with one maid. I can't receive my friends unless I can give them the food they're accustomed to. I can't wear ready-made clothes. I can't go to the pit of a theatre. I can't do all the things I've got to do for the rest of my life."

Jack Ford had seemed very rich to me when I saw him in Aubrey Walk. It didn't occur to me even now what she was talking about. I thought Mr. Grainge had suddenly lost his money.

"It isn't as bad when you're used to it," said I, sorry for her now. "If you show you mind, it makes it so much worse for other people. If you face things bravely—"

"But why should I face things I hate?" said Carol. "Is any man worth a life of misery? Oh, I wish I hadn't a good streak in me; I wish I didn't appreciate nobility in people, and want it more than I want diamonds. Or I wish it satisfied me. But my eyes are so wide open. I know I shall be eternally wretched if I marry, and yet he's the only person I have ever genuinely respected.

He is the only person who sees the good in me. It'll never come out unless it's believed in, and no one else ever will believe in it because I'm such a mixture. Most of me is so infernally bad, but there's one little good spot, and Jack banks on that. But if I marry him I don't believe that spot will hold out long. I shall run off with a Pork Prince or a Duke or something. He's broken off with his aunt, and we shall have to live on three hundred a year." She was clinging to the sofa with both hands, whimpering and staring before her as if she were arguing with herself and not taking notice of me at all.

I could imagine her being silly enough to do anything that came into her head, at that minute. She didn't seem able to resist any of her desires. I couldn't tell her she would be happy with Jack Ford, because the things that make me happy don't interest her, and the things she considers important, like big houses, lots of servants, expensive food and clothes, don't matter to me at all. But she didn't like me sitting silent.

"I have a good spot," said she defiantly. "It was jolly good of me to come and tell you about Richard. Not a woman in a million would have had the pluck. It needed far more than you

have any idea of, for a reason that you will never know."

"You may have meant it well but as it happens you were quite wrong," said I. "Mr. Richard has been in a mess with someone else."

Carol stared at me, like an angry tigress.

"Do you mean you told him what I said?" she asked.

"No. He told me," said I. "He wrote to ask me to forgive him, which I have done."

I knew it wasn't wise to tell her anything, but I couldn't help it. She was too omnipotent.

"But you don't think the same about him after what I said," persisted Carol. "You can't possibly think the same. You may be silly enough to be pleased at having him again, but you won't be able to forget all that I pointed out."

"It has not had the slightest influence on me," said I. She knew nothing of our relations, nothing. How dare she come and manage my affairs as if she knew better than I?

"It can't help having an influence," said Carol, "even though you honestly think it hasn't. Some day you will think of him truly. If you like to wreck your life, some day you will know I warned you, though you won't know how splendid

it was of me to do it." She sat pouting her lips, the most attractive, sulky little mortal, but I could see she was torn in two; she did not want to reveal the secret of her splendidness, and yet she was crazy for me to admire her.

Suddenly she seemed transparent; a greedy little thing, grabbing everything that could tickle her vanity. Jack Ford believed in her goodness; I was overawed by her smartness; Jack Ford's friends let her queen it over them; that was why she came to an attic and played at being a runaway princess, and patronized me, and now was making a romantic marriage.

And yet, the next moment, I saw the shadow in her eyes, and knew she wasn't happy, but was really in fear, and really being torn in two.

"Do you believe in omens and feelings?" said she. "The first time I saw you, I knew we were antagonistic and that you threatened me. Well, I've tried to do well by you, I've gone out of my way to be nice to you, I consider on the whole, I've been very noble, though of course I don't say I haven't sometimes given you a little slap, but on the whole, looking back, I've absolutely nothing to reproach myself with in my behaviour to you. Jack has a theory we get what we give to people, so

ever since I had that warning, I've given you good behaviour, it seems to have worked out right; I seem to have cleared you out of my way successfully; even when I was so frightfully altruistic and came and warned you not to make a fool of yourself with Richard, even that appears to have turned out right for me, and you're mixed up with him again, safely; but all the same, I have the feeling that we've not done with each other yet, and that you're threatening me now, worse than you ever have, and all the worse because I can't see where or how. I distrust things when they look jolly safe. And to-day I've got nothing from you. You seem shut up in a case of Aunt Minnies and stuffy little rooms and domestic virtue. I don't know what you're thinking, whether you really care for Richard, or are just knowing him again to spite me, or whether you're really happy living down here. How long are you going to stay?"

I understood Carol at last, or rather, for the minute, I thought I did. For, thinking it over after, I still can't see why she came, or why she considers herself so splendid to have tried to separate me and Mr. Richard.

I had rather a queer superstitious feeling as she spoke, as if we were pitted against each other and affecting each other, though as she said, she had cleared me out very successfully indeed. I answered her question without remembering what sharp little hooks she always attached to the seemingly irrelevant diatribes, always just the question she wanted answered, and which always got answered because she had made you think of something else, and you spoke off your guard.

"I'm going back on Monday," said I.

"Ah," said Carol in the funniest snarl, and stared at me with wide-open eyes. "But you've given up your room. I heard Sarah has it."

"Only from me; I've told her I'm coming back on Monday, she always knew I was coming back," said I.

"I said we hadn't done with each other," said Carol in the queerest whisper, staring all the time with dilated eyes. "So you're coming back to your sky parlour. Does everyone know?"

"I'm afraid no one is as interested in my affairs as you," said I.

Carol remained looking at me now as if she were mutely pleading for help against a fear she could not bear. When she spoke, I saw she was serious.

"Do you remember me telling you I had a fear that some day everything would be taken from me; everything I'd set my heart on?" said she. "I have that fear still."

"Perhaps when the things are taken from you, you'll find they didn't matter as much as you thought they would," said I, speaking as one would do to a child. She looked like Archibald had looked when he was being led away that awful day of crime and chastisement; waiting for something terrible to happen and knowing she deserved it.

"I've made a mess of things and I'm hanging onto Jack to get me out. He's ready to look after me. But I don't know that respectability is worth being poor for. I'm flinging a romantic, quixotic marriage in the teeth of my people because they're cut up about the way I've behaved with—one or two people. Now I'm thrusting respectable Jack down their throats as they think I'm damaged in their market. That's all they brought me into the world for, to marry me well, and I'm marrying Jack Ford."

I wasn't going to tell her she was making the best match any woman could make and that she ought to be on her knees for gratitude. But it was news that she was marrying because she'd got into a mess and was taking this characteristic step of

getting even with her people. Jack Ford thought he could help her out; she needed someone to knock the nonsense out of her. If she hadn't looked so exquisitely pretty and smart, I should have felt sorrier for her.

"The only thing I can't understand about you is why you're afraid of me," said I, bitterly.

"Afraid," said Carol glaring at me, and then shrugged her shoulders as if she were scornful of herself now. "I don't see why I should be afraid of you, seeing I always get my way," said she. "I made up my mind I would bring Jack Ford to his knees, or rather mine, some time ago, and he's there. I meant him to move, and he did. I put his aunt up to it; and I shall get round her again and see that she makes it up with Jack. You're out of it entirely now; even if you go back to your sky parlour."

"Well I can't see what I've got to do with anything that happens to you," said I. "I never have mixed up, and never shall mix up with your business. I shouldn't dream of bothering about you as you do about me."

"No, you're just Minette, all to yourself, and things happen round you, and you stand quiet and well-bred and never move a finger," said Carol with a sudden leap in her eyes. "I do hate you, Minette; I should like to see you crying and howling and kicking, in a natural way."

I should have liked to have told her people who have things to cry about, can't afford that luxury. It's people with food, clothes, and a home who can wallow in that sort of thing. Good heavens! where should I be if I started to howl and kick when I thought of going back to town with sixteen shillings, the rent of the sky parlour to pay and no glimmer of a job until I'd faced Sir Mordaunt. And even then, the offices to tramp round, again.

And there stood Carol with everything the heart could wish, including the best and finest man she'll ever meet, and yet, not satisfied, and grousing about being "poor." Poor, on three hundred a year, for certain. But its useless arguing with people about themselves.

She had stayed so late that I could smell the fish frying for Uncle Samuel's tea, and Carol smelt it too, I think, for she suddenly said she had stayed an age, and must fly.

I took her down to the big motor drawn up outside the gate, and saw her go off, fashionable and composed, but with the haunting, clouded look in her eyes.

I do wish I knew what she was worrying over, and why she can't leave me alone; and I do wish I hadn't told her about Mr. Richard. It would have been much better to let her think anything about him, than the truth. She can make mischief again now.

When I went back, Aunt Minnie was all apologies for not having appeared to say "Good-bye," but had hoped I was keeping my friend till Uncle Samuel came.

Dear me, I had imagined Aunt Minnie looking up to Carol as some brilliant, tropical bird beyond her ken, but she says Carol reminded her so of Mother! Mother had just that way of pleasing everyone, and dressing so that people turned round in the street to look at her. Whatever she put on, always had an air, and she held herself beautifully. She might have married half a dozen times, and very well too. But she was set on London, and felt she was thrown away in Scroose.

I couldn't help asking how she and father had met. Aunt Minnie went rather quiet and said she believed, informally. There was a party of young men staying on the Common, and somehow they all got to know mother, as young men will. Mother always attracted men of a superior class, she was so ladylike.

I asked if they were engaged long, and again Aunt Minnie took some time to cut the bread and butter, and then said evasively, "Not very long." She (Aunt Minnie) had never approved of suddenness in such affairs, but mother was all for London, and of course my father was only down for the summer. I asked if he took mother back to college but Aunt Minnie said no, he left. I am sure there was some unpleasantness about the marriage, and she has some grudge against father for it. Dear, dear, I can't imagine mother pretty, and smart, and ladylike! Poor little mother. Somehow, I feel so sorry for her; poor little country butterfly, covered with London dust.

But I'm a house-sparrow and my rooftop is the dearest place of all to me, and London, smuts and all, is part of me, and I long for it as sailors want the sea.

Now what am I going to do about Sir Mordaunt? I believe I'll go to his office and ask to see him; I don't believe he'd give me an appointment if I wrote for one.

### CHAPTER XIX

#### THE BATTLE WITH LONDON

October 11th, Monday.

Back in the roar and the rush and the bigness and the zest of this business of a city, and I'm tingling to begin again, even though it needs tons

of extra energy to get back into my niche. It's

worth it.

What a mess Sarah has made of my room. It is true, she has been away, but even then, she can never have washed out a pan since she came, and she appears to have cooked all over the bed, and put down saucepans wherever she happened to be. When I think of the trouble it will be to get things clean and straight again, half the time I want to cry and half the time I'm glad to have something to go at, for coming back has made me think of so many things I want to forget, and nearly had forgotten down in Gloucestershire.

My life up here used to be so rich and full compared to now; Jack Ford's rooms are still empty, and it's like living next to something dead. The happy times are dead; and Aubrey Walk has swallowed up the comfortable, cheery friend, and the silence beyond the wall is more silent than ever.

I have stuck up my Fighting Line again, with another addition. Father is leading them, or following them. He is my leader now; at any rate, I am his faithful follower, and he deserves a place with the men who've faced big issues, even though his battles were fought out in his thoughts, the loneliest and hardest place to fight in, after all.

It's nine o'clock and London is murmuring far below, and the lights are twinkling and blazing in the festival that never grows old, and somewhere down below, Jack Ford is laughing and talking and twinkling, and somewhere Mr. Richard is adventuring and making someone fond of him, flashing incessantly like a sky-sign, and somewhere Sir Mordaunt is shedding his cold arclight truthfully hard and clear; and here I sit, such a dim little flame amongst the wilderness of coruscating, dazzling, powerful, steady flares and

gleams and rays of the people of this Wonder City. It's a marvel mine keeps alight at all. I can only hope it won't be put out altogether to-morrow when I adventure into the presence of Sir Mordaunt (if I ever get there, which now I begin to doubt).

Buck me up, my Fighting Line. I need you.

October 12th, Tuesday.

Sir Mordaunt wasn't in to-day. I called three times.

Hanging about, waiting, does sap one's courage. As I walked about the City, I wondered if he and Mr. Grainge had suspected anything about me and Mr. Richard. They had behaved so queerly that day I took in the Argentine report instead of Miss Beckles. Oh, suppose Sir Mordaunt had suspected! I mustn't frighten myself like this, or I can never face him.

# October 13th, Wednesday.

Not in to-day. Though his motor was drawn up outside. I shall go on calling. How I do bless all those dirty pans, and scratched and dusty things I've got to clean.

My blood is up, though; I deserve a testimonial and I shall call till I get it.

How hard one can try for anything when one feels confident of being in the right.

# October 14th, Thursday.

I have gained the coveted interview, and the scales have fallen from my eyes, and I see myself as the people at the Alliance see me. The men whom I've looked down on, and fancied I was superior to, in my standards of honour.

It's pretty bad to be a worm that is cut off from all personal relations with the men it works for, by the office code of Honour. In Sir Mordaunt's eyes, a clerk is no longer a woman, but a trustworthy machine; if she makes herself felt as a woman she's untrustworthy and dangerous and dishonourable, and the right thing to do is to turn her off at once. What she feels about the men she works for; what she feels about the cause they work for together, is of worse than no account; it's impertinence. Clerks ought not to feel or think; they become live people when they do, and are mischievous in consequence.

What a little fool I was to imagine Sir Mordaunt

would stick up for me and champion me, when I've behaved so badly with his son. I can see now how badly I behaved to let Mr. Richard take me out, and entangle him in an engagement when he never meant it to be that. I knew he never meant to be definite, but I would take nothing else. I held myself above the usual office flirtation, and I used my opportunities in what my employers consider a dishonourable way. I who thought myself honourable; I, who thought myself more important and worth while to the Alliance than the other clerks. I could just curl up and die.

When I think how resolutely I called at Sir Mordaunt's office; how confidently I walked into his room when at last I wore his patience out, when I think of his cold piercing look as I spoke, the words sounding to me even then, presumptuous,—and then, when he answered shortly, curtly, that I was a very clever and impudent young woman, but he was an old hand at this sort of thing. Then he said he always knew what it meant when a girl took such interest in the affairs of her employers, but that I'd overshot the mark when I attacked Mr. Grainge; I had mistaken the pull I had over Mr. Richard.

I stood like a ninny. I suddenly saw the force

of every word that he was saying, and it was true, in one sense. Mr. Richard and I had become friends because of our mutual interests, and I had mistaken our relationship; I had mistaken his attitude to me in the Alliance; Mr. Richard had thought of me as a clerk whose duty was to obey implicitly; he had never seen me as the comrade I had fancied myself to be. Sir Mordaunt said it was no use to try any sort of blackmail on him; I had brought my dismissal on my own shoulders, and he hoped it would teach me I wasn't as clever as I thought. He could answer for his son, that my influence had ceased entirely, and I had better face the fact that I had played beyond my hand. Then he rang, and I went out without saying a single word.

I didn't know I was as bad as that; from his point of view, what he said was justified. From my point of view, I've considered myself as much an individual as Mr. Richard or Mr. Grainge, able to love and feel and fight with them,—beside them.

But from his point of view, I and Miss Patten and Miss Beckles and the host of us that flood the Teashop, are just a crowd of grubby, little grey things, possessing neither sex nor intelligence nor

possibilities, who are taken into an office to do the drudgery. We aren't employed to think or criticize or enter into human relationships with those we work for; we're under them, a sort of halfhuman species; less than slaves for they have no responsibility towards us; it isn't their duty to know how we feed or if we feed at all. When we displease them we are thrown out. I don't wonder now that women scarcely ever rise to important positions; if we come into the labour market, we come in to drudge, not to share its ideals, responsibilities, rewards. If we try to climb up, we do it by getting round our employers, playing on them unfairly, capturing them with nets that self-respecting men ought to snap when they see them.

As for criticizing our employers, standing for something higher than they're standing for, being respected and looked up to by them—oh Fighting Line, how precious thin chivalry wears when it's a question of men and women working together for bread and food and living; when men no longer give but women earn alongside of them, think alongside of them, stand as separate individuals alongside of them.

I see Sir Mordaunt's view of me and all my class.

Part of me shares it. Part of me is content to grub along where he puts me, thankful to be safe, ready to obey unquestioningly, now. Yes, part of me has learned that lesson. But it's the baser part.

My father's daughter, who loves and understands the glorious things he's written; my father's daughter, who has been true friends with a man like Jack Ford; my father's daughter who has the work of seeing his writings get through to the world; that part of me is as free and important as Sir Mordaunt or Mr. Richard or any human soul. That part of me has to be true and brave and honourable; that part of me isn't ashamed of anything I've done, not even of loving Mr. Richard in the way I've loved him, and accepting from him only what a self-respecting woman in his own class would accept. Fighting Line, you are men, except for little Jennie; but I need the courage of men if I'm to face the offices again without a reference. You're men, but I need your pluck if I'm to get my father's novel through. You're men, but as long as I'm brave and go on fighting, the best I can, the best I know, I claim you as comrades, and I feel you saying, "Buck up, go on," just as you'd say it to a man. There isn't an ounce of snivel or pity

in your eyes. They say, "It's a hard world, and we've got to take our knocks alike, women and men, and never mind what anyone thinks of you. Courage is for everyone, women and men; truth is for everyone, women and men; honour's for everyone, and it's the same sort of courage, truth, and honour too."

Never mind what Sir Mordaunt thinks of me. I can't go back to Woodbine Villa for Miss Fitton's come. I've got to get work. You'd call it unwomanly, perhaps, dear Fighting Line, because my heart is dead and I don't feel particularly heart-broken about Mr. Richard; I can only think about getting a job. But how would you have done the things you've done if you'd allowed yourself the luxury of bleeding hearts?

### October 20th, Friday.

I'm coming to the end of things. My furniture's beginning to go. I've just managed the rent. I must keep a corner to sleep in. I've cut out fires though it's piercing cold. I must keep something to sleep under and huddle up in. I can't live on less than one meal a day.

November 9th, Tuesday.

This is the third day without anything. I must get something to eat if I have to go out and cadge it. And there's nothing for the rent. I must have somewhere to sleep. I couldn't stay out in the streets day and night this bitter weather. The first thing that I've got to have is food though.

I can get it if I'll go up to someone I know and say I'm hungry. Why can't I do it? Why should I be ashamed to do it?

I've only to go to someone I know, and ask. It isn't wrong to be hungry. It's only damnable. I wish I knew where Sarah is. I could ask her. Or Miss Beckles.

November 20th, Saturday.

Well, the storm's over and I'm tossed on shore and the sun's shining and a fire's crackling, and food's piled up on the table, and Miss Patten has just gone, leaving the place like a new pin. When I think of the day I left this room—

Yes. The Something is friendly to us. I could have gone to the Teashop and seen Miss Beckles and Miss Patten ages ago; I could have asked

Mr. Grainge for a reference right back when the trouble first started; my chances were waiting all the time. But I decided Mr. Grainge was revengeful, when I ought to have known. Oh, I ought to have remembered that's the one thing he isn't.

When one starts thinking one has been wronged there's no limit to the idiotic things that come crowding up, blinding and obscuring everything.

And to think how little I valued Miss Patten and Miss Beckles as friends, when they have turned out to be the truest friends I have.

I wonder at myself now that I didn't dare go boldly into the Alliance and ask them to stand me a lunch. But I had the stupidest sensitiveness. I got as far as the City, and even the outside of the Teashop and then I just couldn't go in and look for them. The smell and sight of the food drove me mad, but I couldn't go in and ask them for a crust like a beggar. I hung about, making up my mind I would get into conversation with them when they came out, casually, and try and introduce the subject as a joke; but they didn't come out. Finally, I had to go in, for the shop was emptying and I had an awful fear they weren't there after all. The waitress who had spilt the

cocoa once came up to me, smiling kindly as if she knew me. She would have given me a crust, I'm sure, but I daren't ask. I heard they hadn't been to-day, trying to smile as if it didn't matter, for she looked at me in a queer way as if she saw what I was feeling. I suppose they get to know the hungry look, feeding people all day long. So I went out quickly. I was faint with standing about, and desperate, desperate.

Oh, the Something is friendly.

For I made up my mind I'd go to Mr. Richard in his office and ask him to help me. I knew I'd only to go to him, starving, and tell him what his father had said to me, to make Mr. Richard do anything. I'll never judge people again for stealing or even murdering when they're hungry. You get to a point when you can make yourself do the most shameful things without caring. That day, it was as if all the fine part of me was beaten down, and there was only a cunning animal left. Although I still was foolishly, basely proud. When I got to the Alliance, I remember numbing my shame deliberately, saying to myself, "Be brave, be brave," as if what I was doing wasn't the cowardliest thing I could have thought of. I got up the stairs by telling myself how few there were to climb, ticking them off one by one; at the top I met Mr. Benson. I asked him where Mr. Richard was; he stared at me and said he didn't know; Mr. Richard had left three weeks ago.

I don't know why I asked if Miss Beckles or Miss Patten were upstairs. I suppose it was the pride in me that didn't want anyone to know my disappointment. He said they were, so I dragged myself on. I might have been away on a little holiday; they both jumped up in their pleasant, fussy way, and said how jolly to see me again, and a lot of chatter I hardly took in. It was all I could do to sit and smile. Then I heard them saying how they missed me, and how Mr. Grainge had said the other day he wished I were back, and did they know what I was doing. Miss Beckles told him I was a secretary somewhere. Was I still? I said "Yes." Even then, I didn't take in what was being offered.

Miss Beckles said she was jolly glad Mr. Grainge had to feel the pinch; when men got hold of a girl who could type at my speed, they'd have to learn the lesson she was worth her money. I heard Miss Beckles ranting about economic conditions, but didn't take in then that they thought I had

asked for an increase of salary and had left because of that. I did take in, however, that Mr. Grainge and Sir Mordaunt had had a split, and Sir Mordaunt and his son had cleared right out, and Mr. Grainge was now up to his neck in British Columbia, and a Jew named Samuelson was backing the new scheme.

Then again I heard Miss Beckles say how busy they were and Mr. Grainge was the whole thing, and it maddened him to be checked by the idiocy of the girl they'd had, and he was now trying Mr. Benson who was reliable, but not up to my speed; and speed was what Mr. Grainge demanded at all cost.

"I believe you'd get two pound ten if you stuck out for it," said Miss Beckles. "He's used to you and you know his ways, and this work is on the top of him. Why not go in and see him and say you might think it over if he'd make it worth your while. If I were you, I'd ask three. You don't get a fat lot at that secretary job, do you?"

"Not a fat lot," I heard myself saying, still smiling. Miss Patten has told me since that they thought I had gone a little balmy; I sat and smiled in such a soppy way.

There was not much hope in me, even when

Miss Beckles spoke so cheeringly; but I saw Mr. Grainge wasn't as malicious, evidently, as I thought. And I was getting blunted to what he thought. Now I was here, and they were pressing me to go and see him, I thought I might try him for a reference; he could guarantee my speed, at all events. Miss Beckles took me to the door; then I was launched on a sea of Turkey carpet with Mr. Grainge on an island far away. I got across still smiling, and he looked up, surprised and genial, as if we had parted on the friendliest terms, and I told him I had come about a reference as I was wanting to go back into an office again. He said, "Certainly," and I stared.

Like an idiot (for I felt so weak I hardly knew what I was saying), I asked him why he would give me one now and not before; and he looked up astonished and still genial and said "Why? Did you ever send for one?"

Of course I hadn't.

Then he said, "I suppose you don't feel inclined to come back? We've an extra rush at present and I dare say we could find you something to do."

I said I couldn't apologize.

He said, "Oh, that's all right. Sir Mordaunt

has gone now. We shan't have any more trouble there."

As if Sir Mordaunt had been the cause of the trouble.

I said I didn't see what he had got to do with my going, and Mr. Grainge stared at me, and said I might have flirted with Mr. Richard till all was blue, for all he cared, but of course Sir Mordaunt took it in a different light, and at the time he, Sir Mordaunt, had a big pull in the office, so I had to go. But all that was over, and if I liked to come back, on the understanding there was to be no more going down to Hurley till the office work was done (Mr. Grainge permitted himself a roguish smile) I was very welcome to my old place. The business of the cheque and the intercepted letter appeared to have vanished completely from his mind.

I told him I must know where I stood with him about my conduct about the letter. He looked a little annoyed and bored, but leaned back as if for the sake of peace, he'd rake it up again. He said if it gave me any satisfaction, he would admit now he had done a foolish thing in bluffing as he did; he ought to have respected my sharpness more. He had been remarkably impressed by it, especially by my tumbling to the number on the

cheque. Not one girl in a hundred would have remembered to a unit.

I asked why he had insisted on my going if I wouldn't apologize, when I had been right.

He said he didn't admit I had been right in holding back those letters; in fact it had threatened to put him in a devil of a mess, as things were at that time with Sir Mordaunt; although it turned out after, it was a good thing to have had the matter precipitated.

I still said he hadn't explained about the apology. He looked at me with his genial smile which I now see has cunning in it, a naïve self-satisfaction so akin to Carol's, and pointed out he had said I was to stay till I apologized, he had insisted on that! Only Sir Mordaunt had chipped in, and he had to give me notice.

"I see I shall have to speak straight out; you are a very able young woman, Miss Blunt, and how much do you want to come back?" said he.

The whole thing had meant nothing to him; the shame that had agonized me, the pride, the crashing down of my ideals and illusions—it had all been an insignificant incident, and all he could see in my hesitancy now was cunning, sharpness, the desire to get a raise. He seemed greater and

more aloof than ever, not to have been troubled by that which had nearly been the death of me. I heard myself saying I wanted three pounds, and he said, "Oh no, no; What about two ten," and I tried to be cunning too, with an idea of rising to his level, and said, "Make it two fifteen," and he laughed and said I had the habit of beating him, and he mustn't let it grow on me.

Then his laughing voice sounded fainter and fainter; there was nothing to battle for, somehow, now I had a job again. I just pulled myself together to try and keep up pretences till I got outside but somehow the truth came out. I heard myself saying I was not hysterical, for I had had a good holiday and food but I hadn't had anything for the last three days, and should be all right now. And then the room ran round and round in circles with Mr. Grainge coming nearer and nearer, and I knew nothing more till something warm was being forced against my lips, and I looked up into Miss Beckles' face. I was on the carpet, and she was holding me, and Mr. Grainge was hovering near with soup.

I was all right, quite all right, but they made me drink the soup, and Mr. Grainge was like Carol in her nicest phase, and so friendly and kind, I hadn't any fear or scruples about him. He kept talking encouragingly, as if I were a child or someone ill, and finally Miss Patten took me downstairs and there was his motor and we whirled away in it, not to my home, but to Mrs. Patten's who had a spare room. Mr. Grainge had asked the girls to look after me.

I'm so ashamed when I think how I interrupted everything, but the old feeling of home has come back, about the Alliance. They all knew me and behaved as if they were my family, somehow . . . Mr. Grainge wanted me to go to Brighton or Margate for a week, to pick me up; and it ended in Miss Beckles going down with me for the week end as Miss Patten is just engaged.

We seemed to get to know each other well through this, and it came out that Miss Beckles had known about Mr. Richard all along. She had seen me meet him in the taxi that day, when she had come up to me as I waited; she had put two and two together after that; and had been dreadfully, dreadfully sorry, for she was pretty sure from the beginning I had no real chance. She says I'm not the sort of girl who carries an affair like that to a satisfactory end; you have to be so jolly sharp. She says she could have brought it

off once, before she took up the Woman's Cause, because from a child, she never had any mercy in her; there men were, a bad lot, and you'd got to be a jolly sight worse than them, if you meant to keep your end up; so she just played with them and laughed. But when she took up Woman, she despised men too much to accept anything from them or flatter them, and ever since, she's let men see what she thinks of them. She says some of the happiest moments of her life have been cheeking a howling mob; she loves it; it's like wine, especially when they chase you, and it gives you an excuse to get your hands on them. She has read a book lately called Amazons in Antiquity and Modern Times, and says her blood tingled with excitement to find she is the pure type of Amazon, and this book admires them immensely and points out how Achilles wept to see such beauty and valour not for him. Miss Beckles is no more beautiful than in the days when she pictured herself a second Gertie Millar; but she is just as happy now picturing herself an Amazon.

There's something awfully jolly about her, though; and I think telling men frankly what she thinks of them, is braver than plundering them

by tricks. I wonder who the men were that she tricked. She's never been engaged.

I would have liked her better if she hadn't told Miss Patten about Mr. Richard but I suppose it wasn't humanly possible for her to keep it in. Mrs. Patten is a funny, pink-and-white old lady, and I'm afraid she's heard about it, too, for she has told me so much about the good fish in the sea and Marie's disappointment and that second thoughts are always best and there's nothing for a broken heart like plenty of beef tea—home-made—not your nasty bought extracts. Yet after the first shock of being sympathized with, I didn't feel very sensitive; for a few days it has been so lovely to be in a home again, fed up, and petted, and safe.

I like Miss Patten; she has taught me the crochet pattern at last! I still feel confused and blank when I think of Mr. Grainge, for he has been so extraordinarily kind, how can I judge him? I haven't told the girls a word about the cheque. I should hate them to despise him, and Miss Beckles would be so glad of the chance. But I wonder if it wouldn't have been nobler if he had resented my discovery; it seems so callous not to mind and to think trickery quite natural, and objection to

it, cunning, or hysterical. And Carol and he both have a way of passing over inconvenient things, good humouredly——

I can't go on thinking about him or her; I feel too much at sea. He has been very kind and plucked me out of all the miseries and put me in safe hands, and paid for everything like a father might. And I'll work, oh, won't I work for him, when I go back to-morrow.

The proofs of father's book have come by tonight's post. How alive the words look now they are in print!

### CHAPTER XX

#### JACK FORD COMES BACK

Monday, March 20th.

IT is a long time since I've wanted to write in this book. There's been nothing to write about. I've been safe and fairly happy in a neutral sort of way, and the days go by pretty peacefully. But the theatre-goings with Miss Beckles, and the Sundays at the Pattens' and even my visit to Gloucestershire at Christmas haven't been very colourful somehow, perhaps I'm getting dulled now I'm so safe and comfortable. Miss Beckles told me the other day that I was growing plump. Even the excitement of father's book didn't turn out such an excitement after all. There have been fifteen notices, some splendid ones; but no one has written to me about it, and I don't know yet how many, if any copies have sold. It's queer how little in contact with the world a book really brings you.

And now I've something important to chronicle, it is absurdly unimportant, when I think it over.

I met Mr. Richard to-day when I was coming out of the Teashop. The girls went on, and he stopped. After we'd said, "How are you?" we didn't know what to say. He stood there, grinning a little sheepishly and stupidly, and I was crimson, and we had nothing whatever to talk about. He asked if I were still in my old digs, and I said I was back at the Alliance, and had been staying with Miss Patten. I don't know why I evaded saying where I lived. I suppose there was a dim fear that he might drop in one evening if the fancy took him, and I don't want to start all that again. The awkwardness in meeting him for a few moments was unbearable. His family and friends seemed to hang like a cloud, round him, till I could hardly breathe. Finally he said he was late and must be off, and we parted, with mutual relief.

I only wish I'd had the sense to go first, though if I had, he might have been provoked, and come after.

He looked very good-looking, but too pink and healthy and smart and ordinary. When I was little, I never liked Fairy Princes; they were too perfect and too much of a responsibility. I must

be growing into a regular office hack. He didn't arouse the faintest spark of romance in me to-day, only the most unfeigned relief that I was out of that business; when I think back to my misery and fear—the waiting—oh, I'm glad it's over.

There is a real blank still in the top storey which I have all to myself. Sarah didn't take the rooms next door, and I believe I'd rather they were empty. I can sit and remember the jolly times we used to have there, and the place seems sacred to their memory. I haven't heard news of any of them for ages. Sarah is in America, and Aubrey Walk is about as far away. I suppose Carol and Jack are married now.

It is funny how savourless life can become. I suppose it will be savourless now for ever. Still, it's something to be drawing two pound fifteen, a week, and I shall have a ripping holiday this summer. Aunt says I'm to come for a month if I can get off. And I'm to go down for the week end at Easter, and go out primrosing.

Easter Monday, April 5th.

Oh, how empty London feels!

I'll never come back on a Bank Holiday again. If one stays at home through the week end, one becomes acclimatized; but to come back into the tail-end is too depressing.

The fresh skies and sunshine, the happy children, the cosey little house have warmed me and left a smile in me; and yet, and yet, it seems wrong that Woodbine Villa should be the only home I have. I feel as I do when I've been to the Pattens'; much as I like them, I do long for someone who can talk about things above my head. I like doors to open, and views to appear, in conversation; and even though I don't agree and don't understand, I love the sense of being tilted up on my toe-points, stretching up, with wonderful ideas just ahead of I'd love to meet people who could talk of father's book; I showed it to Aunt Minnie and Uncle Samuel and they said it was very pretty in parts (to please me); and I showed it to Miss Beckles, and she said I mustn't be offended, but a man's point of view never interested her on anything, it was always so one-sided; and I took it to the Pattens and left it, but the other day Miss Patten gave it to me again, and said she was very sorry but they were so busy getting her trousseau started that she was afraid they'd never get at my book.

And now to-night, when London is holiday mak-

ing, the loneliness seems unbearable. I've had a glimpse of what companionship might be; I've had a glimpse of a happy, happy circle where thoughts can fly as free as birds or butterflies; and oh, how natural and part of me the whole thing seemed! Too bad that everything pleasant should end.

It's awfully strange, but as I sit here, I could fancy the old familiar smell of onions is coming through the walls, and the mice in the roof make scutterings as if someone was in the rooms next door. Perhaps I think I smell onions because, like an idiot, I forgot the shops would be shut to-night, so my thoughts run on food.

Dear, dear, I wish I had someone with whom I could talk over my one big problem now. I've saved twenty-three pounds, and soon it will be time to make enquiries about the publishing of father's novel. And yet I hesitate because of the way Woodbine Villa is described. No one could possibly mistake it. It would be dreadful if Aunt Minnie recognized the story, and father's view of mother and Scroose. She would never forgive me for publishing such a story. And then my one home would be cut off from me.

I feel such a coward when I think of losing my holidays, and the children, and the welcome, but I

feel a worse coward to think of going back on father for fear of losing some advantage for myself. That smell of onions is real; I'm not imagining it. And it isn't mice; it's someone moving about.

Someone is in those rooms.

I'm going to see.

Jack Ford opened the door, and I looked past him to see his room furnished, and the fire lit; and everything warmed up, and there was some point in living.

I could only look and look. He laughed at the way I stood there, he was as composed as ever, but he didn'tmake me feel uncomfortable. I was silent because I wanted to say so much, I didn't know how to begin. I couldn't get over the fact that he was back again.

Then he said, "Well, Minette, here I am, again. How's yourself?" And I managed at last to say something about having smelled the onions, and he said he was sorry if they had annoyed me, and I said, "Not a bit, they were as good as supper," and then he asked if I'd have some. I don't believe I could have gone away. I meant it for a hint.

Oh, how glorious it was to be inside again, help-

ing him set the table and seeing him get out the coffee. He was exactly the same, chirpy and solid and sensible and annoying and delightful altogether. I could tell him everything at once, somehow; we didn't have to begin again; we seemed to belong together; neighbours—homely, old-fashioned neighbours.

We were so busy at first asking and answering; why he'd come back? and what state were the rooms in? and when did he move in? and all that; that supper was through before we could begin to talk properly. Then he squatted down by the fire to watch his beloved coffee, and I slipped down on the rug too, because I felt at home and natural and happy—happy—

He asked what I'd been doing, and I told him I'd been finding fascinating relations and staying in the country, and that I had left the Alliance and returned to it, and had been generally very busy. I couldn't make out what he was talking of when he asked how the Knight was; it wasn't till I saw he was deliberately averting his eyes, that I woke up and laughed.

"The Knight has gone the way of all my illusions," said I. "I have become a steady-going cab-horse."

"You look jolly well on it," said Jack Ford chuckling to himself as he wiggled the coffee to make it boil.

"I was pretty sorry for myself an hour ago," I said; "but it's jolly to feel you are back. Will the Bird Boy and Simon and Stephen come again?"

"The Bird Boy and Stephen, surely," said Jack Ford. "Simon is a social star a-spangling too high a firmament for my reach at present. I don't like society, Minette."

I don't know when I've been so glad to hear anything as I was when he said this.

"Is Carol coming here?" said I, bringing myself to it with a jerk.

Jack Ford was very busy with the coffee.

"No," said he at last, and that was all.

"Oh, then, you're not going to stay permanently," said I, and my heart went down, down.

"Who can say what is permanent in this world?" said Jack Ford. "The only thing I am sure about is that Carol and I will never like the same things."

"Is that over?" I asked, and he nodded.

Then my heart soared up again, because that meant he was going to stay.

When coffee was dispensed and Jack Ford could give his mind to mundane matters, he brought the conversation back to my affairs.

"So you've had a steady run of luck?" said he.
I grinned a little. It was impossible not to
launch my bomb. Steady run of luck!

"Well, not exactly," said I. "I've been down to the depths and was nearly finished. Not once, either. I've had everything I cared for taken from me; my self-respect has been knocked into a cocked hat; I've nearly been chucked into the streets like the cat you thought I looked like when I strayed into your room, and I've come out hard, I think, with nothing much to care about, and no belief in any human being left."

This wasn't true. Even while I spoke, I was rejoicing in being able to talk at last to the one person whom I could talk to about everything. He hadn't changed; he was his old, dear self; sympathetic and listening and twinkling, and kind—kind—

I wanted to bring all the sadness and the disappointments and the disillusions to him, shovel them down before him, and feel him comforting me till their soreness had gone. I was glad everything had happened to me just the

way it had, so that I could tell him and be comforted.

But he never comforts me the way I expect, or want.

"You're not nearly as hard as you were," said he.

"Why, I used to believe in everyone; I used to idealize—oh, I blush to think of my idiocy," I cried.

"There's no one so hard as an idealist," said Jack Ford. "When you put people on the heights, the inevitable consequence is that you can't keep 'em there, and over they topple, down among the dead men in the depths. Human nature was never made to stand being put upon impossible heights; fortunately, it also refuses to stay in the depths. See it as I do, from a comfortable human level, and you'll find we're all gradually coming along together. Stay with us, Minette; heights and depths are lonely places. When you've sent people reeling from the heights to the depths, it's a temptation almost impossible to resist—" he paused, twinkling, then added, "to look down on them."

"You can't help looking down on people when they've fallen below all possible esteem and trust," said I. "Is any of us worthy of all possible esteem and trust?" said he, and something in his tone made me colour.

"Has Carol told you?" said I. "You know then, about the Alliance?"

"The first night you spoke of it, you told me all I want to know about that," said Jack Ford, grinning openly. "I knew there was no man in the City who could fill the bill you'd outlined."

"I'm going to tell you all about it," said I, and told him everything, from my discovery of the missing cheque, my first suspicion of the lie in the letter, Mr. Richard's suggestion and attitude, Mr. Grainge's deliberate lie, or bluff, ending up with his callousness and kindness. I didn't tell him about my engagement being broken off, nor of Sir Mordaunt's displeasure although those omissions made the story rather incomplete.

Mr. Grainge was the perplexing feature.

"He still talks as though he were an honourable man," said I, "although he admitted having bluffed about the cheque. He doesn't seem to think a lie or two in business, matters. He said the other day that he knew he could trust me, as if he were pleased to be able to do so. Now is that extraordinarily magnanimous in him, or callous?

From the way he spoke, he appeared to think he demanded a high standard of trustworthiness from people."

"Well, trustworthy clerks are convenient," said Jack Ford. "And what we ask from other people doesn't always level up to what we do, ourselves."

I went crimson.

"Grainge seems a decent sort, as his type goes," said Jack Ford. "He's a big man, in all senses. I can't understand him dismissing you like that, if you were useful. He gets annoyed when little dogs snap, but I shouldn't have said he is the sort to punish them. I've seen something of him lately. He's a bigger type than Carol, and she's uncommonly big, in streaks. It's her damned woman's upbringing that's made her what she is."

I had to tell him Mr. Grainge hadn't dismissed me. I got it out at last, about Sir Mordaunt's point of view. And mine.

Jack Ford stared in the fire, and wasn't as ready with his sympathy as I'd expected. Instead, he said, one must play cricket. Offices had to have a certain code; girls had to keep it up, as they always suffered most if it was broken. It was a rotten state of things, but if people had been bred

up in the fear of society and money it was a jolly difficult thing to get them to see things humanly, and the average office girl would make a bee-line for a susceptible young man who could give her a motor and a handle to her name. "So I don't blame Sir Mordaunt," said he.

"It was just the things that most girls would make a bee-line for, that stood between us," said I between my teeth. "They separated us from the first. I loathed the idea of knowing Mr. Richard's friends and racketting about and dressing up and not being able to go down to the office; I hated the life I knew I'd have to lead; I was making as much of a sacrifice in giving up the sort of life I'm used to, as—as—he would have done if he'd given up all the things he liked."

"So it doesn't seem to have been quite a heavensent union, does it?" said Jack Ford, very much engrossed with the fire.

"We understood each other though, yes, through it all," I cried; and again I knew I wasn't speaking the truth, for we never had understood each other; we had only admired and been excited by each other. When my dark hours came, Mr. Richard was of no use to me.

But I was angry with Jack Ford for making

nothing of my great romance, and I purposely piled it on, and sighed, and said: "Love reconciles the most different points of view, in time."

"Even as different as ours," said Jack Ford, trying to make a joke and bring the conversation onto a commonplace level.

"Nothing will reconcile those," said I viciously.

"I believe in the fundamental independence of every human being."

"We are one there," said Jack Ford. "I should have said you believed in shoving other people's apple-carts, and squealing when you get into a ditch."

"Look here, you've got to understand what I've been through," said I, for we couldn't go on talking in this light sort of manner. Then I told him everything. I told him I'd sat here and cried with the sheer pain of being hungry; I told him I'd turned sick at oatmeal and couldn't get anything more; I told him how I'd tramped until my shoes wore out and I had to sit here with no living soul to talk to; and I had no friend to go to; and his rooms were empty. He said he knew he ought never to have left. He really was affected then.

And yet all the time, I was uncomfortably aware

that things hadn't turned out so badly even if it had been beastly at the time. If I hadn't been forced to open the tin box from ennui, I should never have unearthed father's writings; if I hadn't been forced to publish them and economize, I should never have gone down to Gloucestershire and made friends with Aunt and Uncle and the children; if I'd got a job directly I came back, I should never have found out what bricks Miss Beckles and Miss Patten were, and what true friends the Alliance people had been all the time, and I never should have forgiven Mr. Grainge. And if the business with Mr. Richard had to be broken, and in my heart I was relieved and glad that it was over, why, it was better to have seen and drawn back before anything irremediable had been done.

But I wanted Jack Ford to be sorry for me; I couldn't bear him to sit there so impersonally, twinkling away and philosophizing. I knew he could be such a splendid friend, and I loved it so, when he said, "Little Minette, Little Minette" as if he were patting me.

How contemptibly one can angle for affection. No. I wasn't comfortable; it was like getting something on false pretences. I asked him to tell me about Aubrey Walk and his career. I felt stupidly nervous at the way he looked at me.

But we had got into a maudlin state, thanks to my idiocy.

He said he had been in the depths, only they were sticky ones, and the more he floundered, the worse he stuck.

If the world could get hold of an artist, it would, then it would tie his hands, cram his mouth with dust and ashes, and galvanize him into dancing like a monkey. Everyone had been telling him he must behave like normal people in his class, and so he had bought flannels and gone in for tennis. The first time he entered the courts he went flat on his nose, and when he got up and went for the ball, he fell into the net and went through it. He hadn't imagined there was any art in tennis; he thought you just picked up a racket and played. But the sight of those horrible women sitting round, had given him palpitations, and so he had palpitated. He had done all sorts of things he didn't want to do; he had dressed every night even when alone, in case anyone should come in; he had never felt there was a moment when he could sit comfortably in his shirt-sleeves. He had had to sit at

the table all through a meal, because of what the maid would think. He had to have coffee made (undrinkably) in the kitchen; he could never bring in anything he saw in the shops and liked the look of, and his cook would only shop by telephone and resented suggestions. What he hated the most was the awful insincerity, however, when women rang him up and asked him to dinner, and said they couldn't promise him a dinner but just something to eat, and he was sat down to eight courses.

The whole business made him sick and dizzy, and he had come to the conclusion he was a natural throwback, and his family must give him up.

He had run away from home when he was eighteen because the whole business had seemed so like a treadmill; he had been all over the world, and had got into settled ways, and now at his age, he could not be put back into a pot and simper on a window-ledge. And he could only work with his collar off, and ink-smudges just where he chose to place them.

How I loved to hear him talk like this, in one way; but in another, he was a little bitter, as if he had been a failure and knew it, and I don't like him to mind anything; I like him to continue

unruffled. He had had a bad time, evidently, with Carol, and I suppose I was proud for him, and wished he wouldn't think all the littleness important; besides, Mr. Richard took all that sort of thing so easily and triumphantly. I don't like him to score in any way over Jack Ford. So we stopped talking and sat looking at the fire, neither of us feeling we appeared to very great advantage, I fancy; and presently I said I must be off and asked him to supper to-morrow.

All the same, it is glorious that he's back.

Back, and free.

I wonder what's happened to Carol. She must have broken the engagement and perhaps that is why he is sore.

Still, he'll be so much happier here, that he'll forget her.

I can hardly believe he's back, and everything is to be the same, only nicer. We have become much truer friends now, in this time when we've not seen each other. That's funny.

## April 7th, Wednesday.

Once more my little room is hanging out its banners; white narcissi this time, everywhere, white and green, and heady with the scent of spring; and again the little sky parlour has opened like a flower and I am looking down a new unimaginable vista.

Fighting Line, you have been my friends and guardians and comrades, just the thin line of you, propped up there, and to-night, you have been the means of helping me again. How strange to think what treasures this little room has held for me; the old tin box that I used to put my saucepan on and use as a step to reach the window, turned out to be a magic trunk, from which came the means of getting food when I was starving, and which opened also, to give me interests and a purpose; which opened to fill my mind with brave thoughts and a new sense of life.

The tiny mantelshelf has held a row of friends, always there to comfort me; friends that I've added to, living helpers. My window has framed inspiring pictures, night and day; red roses made the summer sweet, in that brown casserole and willow-pattern jug; I've rubbed my heartaches away on the saucepans and the candle-sticks; and I've curled up in the chair as if it were a refuge, and the fire has crackled like a warming beacon, signalling "Home." And now, little sky parlour,

you're swept and clean and garnished with white flowers which have made Jack Ford see me, as Mr. Richard saw me once, only in an even nicer way.

What a happy evening it has been.

I brought home cooked food, because I didn't want the smell of cooking, and Jack Ford was properly appreciative of the pretty feast. He grinned like anything, and the silly depression and maudlinness of last night had left both of us; we were just happy.

He made fun of me, of course, because I had put on my new white silk blouse to match the flowers, and had twisted a green ribbon in my hair, but I didn't mind. I told him it was ripping to have him back, and I wasn't going to pretend I wasn't happy. He said I must have someone to worship, mustn't I? I told him I knew all his faults and would say them off, if he liked. But he said, No, to-night we would only regard each other's virtues. I told him he would have to give me some artistic advice after supper when he'd helped me wash up. This I insisted on.

When everything was put away, we leaned on the window-ledge and looked out in the moonlight. It was a heavenly night. Away up here, it was as good as being outside. The wind puffed in gently through the window and everything was so quiet and sweet. The sky parlour was dimly lit behind us, a dear little nest of flowers and shining things, and London was below, in its lamp-lit dress.

It was a night when one could talk of serious things, and I felt he would know just what was best to do about father's novel. I hadn't talked of father to him yet.

So I told him the problem from the beginning. How interested he was!

At the end, he said that explained everything. He had always felt I was an artist. Only artists took things seriously and at the same time stood away from them, and saw them going on like a dramatic performance. He did wish he had known my father and wanted to read all he had written, and then he would decide about the novel. If it were any good, it ought to be published. Artists had to put down what they saw. They wrung their art out of their lives. So it was other people saw the sort of lives they were leading, and struggled to rise out of their triviality.

He only asked that a book should be the writer's true experience; we had to be relentless with ourselves and all the mass of human lives around us; and after all, the only part that determined the worth of the book was our point of view of everything. He thought my father's point of view sounded true and promising, and if so, his point of view must be given.

Such a strange thing came out then; he asked my father's name and it turned out he only knew me as Minette.

When I told him, he stared at me, and then drew out his pocket-book; in it was the first poem that had come out in the *Westminster*. He had meant to write to the man and tell him how much he liked it, but somehow, his slackness had stepped in.

I jumped down and showed him father's photograph. I told him father's history, and how his people had cast him off. When I said where they used to live, Jack Ford stared harder and harder at the photo, and at last said he believed father was the man his Aunt used to talk about. The cousin who had been a genius and married beneath him, and whom his Aunt had always thought a sort of Chatterton.

"It was just at the time when Dowson died," said Jack Ford. "And though this man was the most far-away of relations, and I believe, had cut himself off, for his family seem to have been ready

enough to be friendly, still my Aunt's sentimental soul saw a likeness, and I always attribute her interest in me to that. Good heavens, when she knows he left a daughter, to starve."

"Do you mean, she'll be friendly," said I, with such a thrill. I've had enough of being in outer darkness. To find I was sort of relation of Jack Ford's, or rather, of his Aunt's—

"Friendly!" groaned Jack Ford. "Oh, Minette, you're doomed. She'll adopt you and dress you and travel you and launch you, and I shall have to come back to it all with you keeping me up to the scratch."

"She won't take me away from here," said I.

"Oh, won't she," said he. "You may refuse at first, but she'll ask you to lunch, and to parties, and dress you, and motor you, and you'll fall, Minette. You'll never withstand it. When she hears what a brick you've been, how you've rescued his work, and launched it, and have saved up your poor little earnings to pay for his novel; why, there's nothing she'll think good enough for you. And she'll see a means of paying something back, don't you know; all the past resuscitated and made to bloom anew and so forth."

He always laughs.

I was gripping the window-ledge as if the Aunt was tugging behind.

"I won't give up my sky parlour and the office," said I. "I couldn't be happy anywhere else, any more than you."

"She'll be too much for you," said Jack Ford.

"But why tell her, you needn't, you mustn't," I cried.

"I believe you want to stay here," said Jack Ford, staring at me.

I just held on to the window-ledge.

"Do you know what Mr. Richard called me," said I; "Jasmine. Because we saw some yellow jasmine shining out from a dingy wall in a dingy tow-path in March, before any leaves were out. Well, I'm all right in a grey workaday place, it's natural to me, but put me with red roses, and I wither, I wither."

"Jasmine?" said Jack Ford. "What beastly cheek. You don't belong to greyness."

"I do. It's natural to me," I repeated. "I like the name, too; it's so pretty and flowery. It's a little like Minnie, Jasmine, you see, but it's nicer."

"I can see you as Jessamine, perhaps, but that's a summer flower," said Jack Ford. "I see you as

the white kind, with little stars, sweet and clean and cool; you know how the jessamine stars come out one after the other, till you can hardly breathe for the sweetness, and yet the wood's jolly thick, and goes steadily climbing up and up, till it makes a jessamine bower of sweetness and shade. That's what you are, Minette, a shade from the razzledazzle, out there, down below; Minette in her jessamine bower up here."

"Goodness me!" said I faintly. And then remembered the poem I had seen, and that it was easy for him to talk like this. "What's Carol like?" said I.

"An orchid without any scent," said Jack Ford, "no leaves and all flower, the most expensive and splendiferous and exquisite and perfect orchid that ever collectors roamed the world around for; as difficult to grow and keep, too; quite priceless; for a millionaire who can concentrate on tending the orchid and exhibiting it." He was grinning at me as if he fully understood what I was thinking. And wasn't ashamed one bit.

"I shot too high, Minette," said he; "but she is the most fascinating of women. I shall always like Carol. The extraordinary thing is, in the depths of her rudimentary small soul I believe she likes me."

"Did you or she break it off?" I asked, for a memory was stirring, that day at Woodbine Villa when the fear had looked out of her eyes.

"Well, I really was breaking it off from the moment we met," said Jack Ford; "but I got more entangled, somehow, she is so plausible. At one time, I honestly thought I must rescue her. But then, something happened, and I knew it wasn't fair to her, and since that day, I've been steadily proving to her that it wouldn't do. I nearly broke it off when she wanted a parlour-maid. And then I broke off with my Aunt. And I became a bear, and altogether I don't want to think back. The only consolation is that she's well out of it."

"What happened?" said I. I couldn't forget the look in Carol's eyes.

Jack Ford looked out for some time, then he said: "Will you promise to be unusually sensible and not think silly things if I tell you?"

I nodded. He does smack one in the face, sometimes.

"Well, you know that day you came to Aubrey Walk, and we saw the bread?" said Jack Ford. "You were hungry then, weren't you?"

I nodded again.

"I never mistake the look," said Jack Ford.
"You may have noticed how easy it was to get rid
of us? I thought you'd come back for the bread.
Did you?"

"It was gone," said I.

"Oh damn," said Jack Ford. "I banked on you getting it. I didn't know what to do. I daren't ask you, I daren't come and see you. I was engaged to her then, and I couldn't trust myself. I sort of half broke it off that week, and came, and found Sarah installed and heard you'd gone to Gloucestershire, and knew you were all right, and that gave me time to do the thing more decently. Honestly, Carol broke it off herself in the end. I made a point of the washing being done at home. I don't know how that inspiration came; I said we must have a copper and a woman in, if we had to live at Balham to do it, and I wouldn't budge."

"But what had my being hungry to do with you and Carol," said I blankly. "Or having your washing done at home."

Again he hesitated. He must think me conceited.

"You're quite sure you can look at the matter

sensibly, and not think silly things?" said he. "Some girls might construe what I am going to say, so personally and stupidly."

"I shan't," said I.

"Well, I knew, when I saw that look in your eyes, that I didn't want to take care of Carol, and the only woman a man has any right to marry is the woman he wants to take care of, through earth and hell," said he. "I don't feel competent of taking care of Carol; she wipes me out flat. But—"

"I don't agree at all, no self-respecting woman would accept a man's pity," said I, more stung than I can say. How could I take his remarks in anything but a personal sense?

"You little goose," said Jack Ford, and grinned at the distance. "Now I'm not going to talk about ourselves another minute. I knew you'd shy, but you would have it."

"I hate being pitied," said I.

"What a lie!" said Jack Ford. "What were you doing all last night but playing on my heart-strings till they nearly snapped, and strong man as I was, I broke up and w—w—wept."

"And who tried to make me pity you?" said I. But all the same, I was glad he had seen through

me; it was more wholesome and like him, than letting me snivel.

"Ah, but I don't pretend I don't like you to pity me," said he, good-humoured and jolly as if we had been discussing the most casual topic. "I simply soaked myself last night in it; lovely, like treacle. You do pity a fellow so nicely when you do pity him, Minette. I shall often come to you for pity."

"And laugh at me after," said I. "No thank you, not next time."

"Ah, now you're forcing the pace, and it isn't decent," said Jack Ford, smiling at the stars, as if he had a private understanding with them. "Though I hadn't much hope of keeping up a decent show of blightedness when I got back. I'm so jolly happy, aren't you?"

I couldn't say I wasn't, so I said nothing.

"And Mr. Richard's gone the way of all pink, prosperous flesh," said Jack Ford, hanging out till I was afraid he'd fall.

"How did you get on with Sarah when you came here?" said I.

"Catastrophically," said he. "I told her I didn't believe in suffrage or independence, what a woman wanted was a man to take care of her, and

pity her, and feed her, and fuss her up, and write poems to, and take out in the country, and generally dry nurse."

"Heavens!" I cried. "How contemptible!"

"Sarah foamed at the mouth," said Jack Ford.
"You'll have to ask her to meet me, and argue with
me. Do you remember that was the excuse I
made when I first asked you. Oh, Minette, what
a scared little thing you were. I thought you'd
be out of the room, every minute."

We began to talk of old times, and the Bird Boy, and Simon's success. It was so jolly hearing about them and discussing them.

Before he left, I asked him to let me see his book. I would only lend him father's novel on that condition.

He scratched his head a minute, and then took a sudden resolution.

"Perhaps you'd better know the worst at once," said he, "If you'll promise to be sensible and not think silly things."

"I know the poems are what you call love poems," said I, curling up my nose.

"Honestly I didn't realize; honestly, I thought it was merely artistic impressions," said he.

"And then you became engaged to her," said I.

Jack Ford looked at me with twinkling eyes, that made me want to throw something, and yet I wanted to laugh, too, partly from happiness. It's so jolly to have him back.

"Will you promise to tell me your exact sensations when you read the book?" said he. "Honestly, whatever they are?"

"No," said I.

He laughed. "Oh well, I shall know," said he. "When you've read it, I won't pretend another minute, Minette, and it will save time and trouble if you'll do the same. I shall give you the book in the morning or you wouldn't sleep a wink to-night."

He is conceited. But I don't believe I shall sleep a wink as it is. I can't help thinking about Carol. I wonder if Jack does understand her as clearly as he thinks. I'm absolutely certain she cared for him. Poor Carol. Struggling to get out, and even Jack not understanding. I don't feel a bit jealous, I can't forget how she looked, asking and asking to be freed.

Surely in his poems, he will recognize the side of Carol that could have stood poverty and difficulties when she'd once plunged in.

I'm longing to read his book; to see what he was

thinking of in those early days when we first knew each other. What was it he said? Writers can only write of what they know, and see. How interesting his point of view will be.

## Thursday.

There isn't a word in the book about Carol; not a verse, not a line that can be construed into a reference. There are four poems in the book to a woman: To an Attic Goddess; To a City Sparrow, how dared he think of me as that; To the Sky Parlour, and—and—Neighbours!

Are we neighbours in thought? Are we as near as he says?

And what on earth am I going to say to him when I see him?

Jack Ford walked into the Teashop to-day when Miss Beckles and I were having lunch, and I had to introduce him. Miss Beckles was icy. I think her dislike of men is becoming genuine.

But by some happy chance, Jack Ford always hits on the right way of treating people; he had just bought one of his nasty little labour papers and was full of an editorial on Forcible Feeding. Miss Beckles could not resist joining in, especially

as I disagreed with them, and thought the Government justified in any coercive measures to uphold the law.

Finally Miss Beckles asked him if he belonged to the friends of Woman's Suffrage Society.

Then Jack Ford astonished us both by going further than anyone has yet gone in the matter. He said Woman had enough friends, too many in proportion. He was turning his attention to Man; in fact, he was thinking of taking the plunge and coming out openly as the first New Man. From the Fall Man had followed Woman's example, being naturally conservative, but the time was now becoming ripe for pioneers to start. He didn't anticipate enough followers at present to form a society, which in a way was a blessing as it would save him a subscription.

I asked what on earth he meant.

He said the curse of femininity had been seen, and was being overcome, but the curse of masculinity still remained to be shown up. Femininity had cringed, flattered, and deceived; masculinity had swaggered, ogled, and been deluded. Masculinity was now causing decent upright individuals to refuse the elements of justice and fair play and freedom to citizens who'd proved their capability

in every department of the nation's work; masculinity caused sane people to go into paroxysms of hysteria and panic under the delusion they were being patriotic and courageous; masculinity caused professed Christians to be unbelievably selfish and dishonest in their families.

Femininity had been thoroughly exposed as a drag on the intelligence and progress of the community, but the very people who were getting free from it, still saw the worse pitfall of masculinity as something to be emulated.

So he was going to try and break free from its trammels and set an example.

"You don't believe in men being brave?" said I and remembered suddenly the dreadful night when he came home from the Suffrage Riots, and went crimson for his shame.

But he only laughed. "Oh, you do love red fire," said he. "If you could only understand how easy it is to punch anyone when you're blind with fear. What you call bravery is the lowest instinct of self-preservation. We dress ourselves up in uniforms, bang drums, blow trumpets, buy the most expensive defensive implements that we can think out, then agree to herd together and defend each other, and call ourselves heroes. We keep

women resolutely out of that particular business, so that we can have sufficient appreciation. In fact, that's the reason why we keep them out of every business that's lucrative or impressive. Masculinity must be admired. Just think what's before me when I face the world as the new man, who doesn't feel there's anything particularly admirable about being a man, any more than there is about being a woman. Point is, what sort of man or what sort of woman? Masculinity has had such a soft job up till now. It's the easiest thing in the world to feel masculine, just as it's the easiest thing in the world to feel patriotic when a band plays emotional tunes and well-fed well-kept masculines in uniforms swank by."

"I shouldn't like men to become unmanly, ever," said Miss Beckles. "I've too much fighting spirit. The only thing I ask is to be treated as their equal. But we shall always be different."

"Oh, it is funny to think England is supposed to be a Christian country," said Jack Ford. "When you come to think of it, only one model has been given for man and woman; one life as an example; and there we've gone and divided ourselves up into manly men and womanly women till we're all at each other's throats now, tearing each

other to pieces, trying to keep our peculiar distinctions and qualities and perquisites separate."

Miss Beckles had become very stiff; I thought it rather out of place to introduce a sacred topic in a casual conversation. He doesn't know Miss Beckles at all. I don't mind the blasphemy, but there's such a thing as good taste in such matters; and there are certain things one doesn't speak about.

But Jack Ford has no sensitiveness.

As we didn't answer, but looked at our plates and the menu and spoke of the heat, he continued.

"There's one good sign," said he; "men will soon have to wake up to their tendency to hysteria. It will be a great thing when we begin to go for this curse of sentimentality which blights our nation. There is no more sentimental concept than the English male, from the day when he is dandled as the heir, sent to a school to learn about the gentlemen who have made England what it is, passed on to a university to meet useful people and improve his acquaintance with the English homes of heirs, and finally launched out as a chip of the old block, ballasted with bunkum, to make sentimental speeches about his country and his King, or The People, according to his party, while the

rate-payers keep up the most obsolete and inefficient systems of law and government that Sentimentality can devise."

"Dear me!" said Miss Beckles; this was her first experience of him. She was as shocked as I used to be. Of course now I know that he always talks like this.

"No nation is worth anything without ideals," said I. Though as he spoke, I couldn't help seeing a picture of Mr. Richard. He had had an easy time of it, and he had been a little spoiled through it.

"What sort of ideals?" said Jack Ford. "I'm only asking for a better brand. English ideals and Christian ones are at present fundamentally opposed. You can't find the slightest tendency to snobbery in the New Testament; nor an excuse for patriotism, class distinction, or capital, or competition. The whole basis is universal, democratic and co-operative, which brings me to my point; the root of the trouble is economic."

"Dear me, from what you've been saying, I should have thought it was religious," said Miss Beckles, trying to sneer at him consistently but obviously out of her depth and utterly at sea.

"Now look here," said Jack Ford, pushing his

plate away, squaring his elbows on the table, and warming up. "What's keeping men and women apart now? Nothing but this idea of competition. What's keeping all the intelligence of the community divided up into opposing parties, whose one aim is to hinder the steps that everyone knows are essential? What's holding up the resources of the community and converting income into capital?"

"And what's making us leave this most interesting discussion and fly?" said I.

"Oh, but I say, wait a minute; well, look here, I'm coming in to-night," said Jack Ford. "Mind you're in, Minette."

How Miss Beckles stared. I simply rushed her to the desk. As we went out, she said she supposed two was company but he really was a most original gentleman. She was always amused to hear men talk. Anything to curry favour now the woman's hour was near.

Jack Ford seems to have forgotten I have read his poems. I shan't refer to them if he doesn't.

All that Jack Ford had said, stuck in my mind and depressed me. He struck me as being unfair. Men aren't perfect, but there have been some jolly

brave ones; I wish he wouldn't be so sweeping. He claps his ruthless hands together and my beautiful bright bubbles break. I didn't get comfort out of my Fighting Line to-night.

But he had certainly cured me of any sentimental feeling about his poems. When he came in, he found me cleaning shoes, and I continued to do so. He didn't start his argument again though; only settled in a chair and watched me.

Some one had to say something at last, so I asked him if my Fighting Line annoyed him. He smiled rather vaguely and said he wasn't looking at it; then he sighed, pulled himself out of his dream, and said he nearly fled at sight the first time he came in and saw it. I asked why. He said well, it was no worse than a row of photographs of my pet actor. At least, not much worse.

I said, "We must have this out."

He said, "I object to spectacular virtues; you have a tendency to label yourself brave and true, Minette, and to enjoy it. But why not, bless you. The cure is to give you someone else to think about."

"I wonder why you come here; I wonder why you have anything to do with me," said I, and picked up the shoe again. "From the very first

you've shown you think me a prig, and a narrow, ignorant one at that."

"Oh come, come, I've shown I've been very fond of you," said Jack Ford. He said it straight out.

"Fond of a prig?" said I at last, making myself say the word as easily as he had.

Jack Ford sighed again and sat up.

"I always have felt this sort of thing ought to be done sanely," said he. "Look here, Minette, you know perfectly well why I've come back."

"Because you want your freedom," said I, faintly. One can't talk sanely with a man when he's looking at you like that.

"No, I want yours more; or I want you. I dunno. Help me out. It would be just like you to tell me I'm entirely wrong and you'll never be happy unless you get hold of that swollen-headed young ass who understands you about as well as—as—you understand me," said Jack Ford, and suddenly jumped up, and went to the window.

I hadn't the faintest idea what to say. I was guessing, of course, in a way; but if I guessed wrong. And there was Carol.

I went on cleaning the shoe; there was no polish left but I rubbed and rubbed.

"I'm not going down on my knees," said Jack Ford at last, his back to me.

"You wouldn't see much if you did," said I, trying to speak as Carol would have done. "Would your eyes come over the window-ledge? I don't think so."

"And I'm not going to take you in my arms," said Jack Ford. "We're going to talk the whole thing out like a sensible man and woman. I always made up my mind to that."

"Did you with Carol?" said I. I wasn't feeling a bit sensible though I was struggling my level best to keep up to what he wanted. I couldn't feel anything but sentimental. The only way of keeping sane was to go on rubbing.

"Oh dear, have we got to have all that out?" said Jack Ford. "No, I didn't talk things out with Carol. Directly I did, I began to break it off. But I'm trying to do the other thing with you."

"You don't talk about that sort of thing when you're in love with a person," said I, and saw Carol's melting eyes, and realized what they had been to one another, and could have cried my heart out for the pain of it, if he hadn't said: "You know, don't you," so savagely that I saw he was thinking of Mr. Richard and feeling just as angry.

"What things do you want to talk about?" said I.

"I don't want to talk about anything," said Jack shortly.

We didn't say anything for a bit, then he said: "Come and look at the stars, Minette, and let us both realize what infinitesimal atoms we are and how precious little we matter."

"I think we do matter," said I.

I was not going to him like a little dog.

After looking at the stars a bit longer, he said, "Will you marry me, Minette," and I said, "No; I'd rather be as we are, thank you."

I couldn't rub any more. I went and sat down by the fire, miserable and happy together; glad that he liked me after all; but afraid of being sentimental and laughed at. He was so far above me in his ideas, and I didn't know how to behave sanely. At the same time, I was glad he wasn't being like Mr. Richard and flirting and taking things for granted. It was like Jack Ford to ask me bang out, and face the whole thing squarely.

I couldn't help thinking of Carol though.

I found myself staring up at my despised Fighting Line. They had been through so much with me. I shall always keep a friendly feeling, although their importance seems now just a little like Uncle Samuel's. And all the time, I kept thinking back to Carol, and wondering what would happen if she knew Jack liked me. Supposing I said yes, she would come again, and then,—I couldn't be sane then.

"What's up, Minette," said Jack Ford close by me; and sat down and put his hand on mine. "Tell me all about it."

So I told him.

By the time I had finished telling him, I saw I need never be jealous of Carol or afraid of not pleasing him or not being sane. He says that for some time he liked to think I was the new order and Carol the old order, and that was why she was afraid of me; he feels the type of girl that has been brought up to take and take, is going, and he was awfully sorry for her, because he liked me so much better and felt so much more comfortable and at home with me; so he went out of his way to be nice to her with fatal results.

The situation was complicated by my sky parlour. It was impossible not to see what a jolly little place we should have together, and how comfortable we both could be.

He doesn't attach any importance to Mr. Rich-

ard. A week together would have cured me of that. He met Mr. Richard at the Grainges', and says that living with him would be like living with a nice simple boy of fourteen. Mr. Richard was going in for Badminton and explained the rules in detail.

I told Jack about Aunt Minnie and Uncle Samuel, and he says we'll go a walking tour for our honeymoon, and look them up. He doesn't mind. He says I shall be much more bored with his Aunt.

We planned everything out ever so sanely; but not at the opposite sides of the room.

I told him anyone who read those poems would have thought he was in love. He said everybody did, including Carol. I asked if he wasn't just a little; and he said that should be the riddle of the future.

It is very cowardly of him not to own up.

I haven't owned up either, though, and I won't till he does.

THE END.

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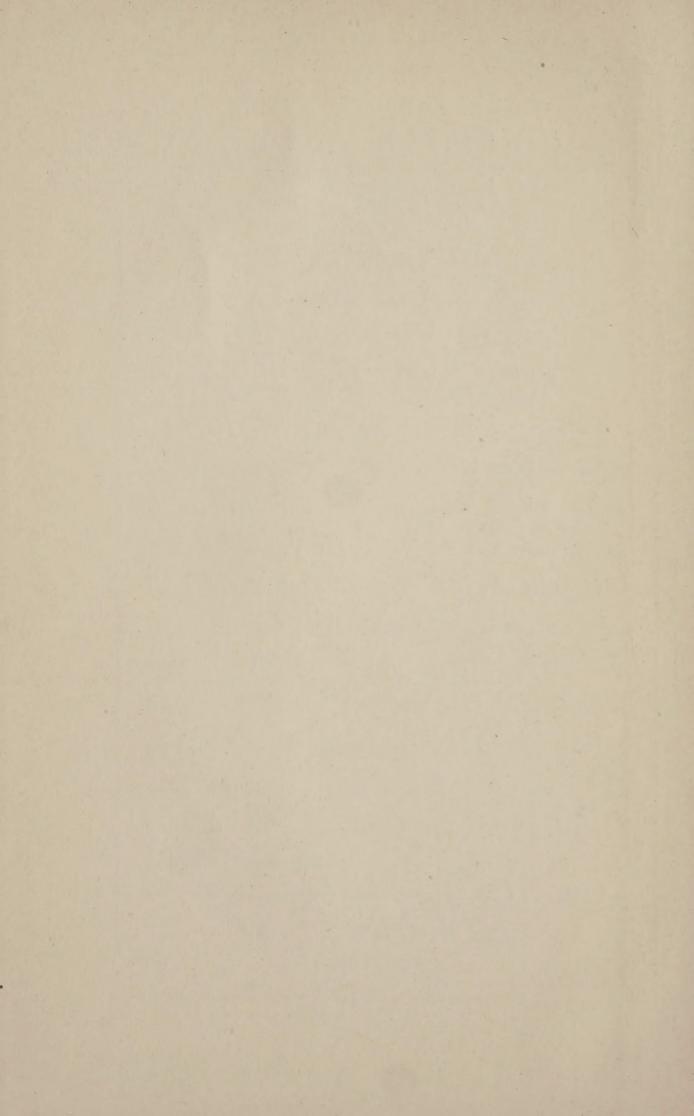
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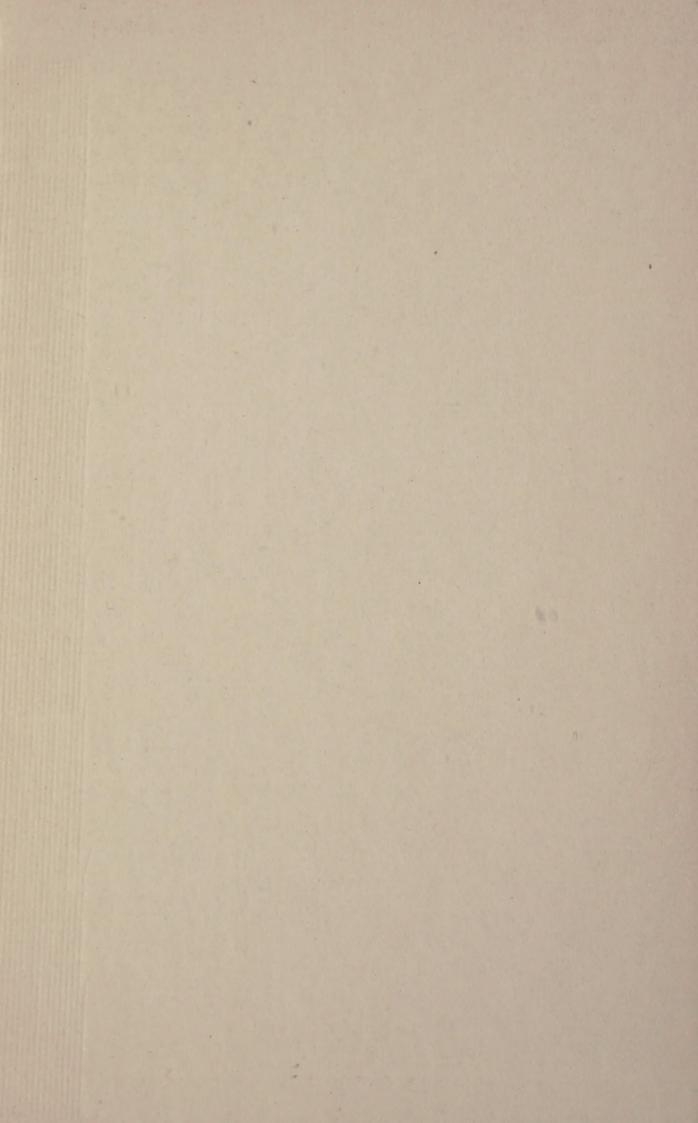
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